

SEED OF THE SUN



WALLACE IRWIN

Christmas 1921 -
Father Myers, from,
Geo & Gladys.



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SEED OF THE SUN

WALLACE IRWIN

BY WALLACE IRWIN

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SUFFERING HUSBANDS

TRIMMED WITH RED

THE BLOOMING ANGEL

VENUS IN THE EAST

PILGRIMS INTO FOLLY

NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

SEED OF THE SUN

BY

WALLACE IRWIN

AUTHOR OF "THE BLOOMING ANGEL," "TRIMMED
WITH RED," "LETTERS OF A JAPANESE
SCHOOLBOY," ETC.



NEW YORK
GEORGE H. DORAN COMPANY

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I A TOWN AND A NAME	9
II A DECISION IN THE NIGHT	23
III BARON TAZUMI	32
IV HENRY JOHNSON	42
V THE OLD WIFE AND THE NEW	55
VI AN HOUR'S WEAKNESS	65
VII THE OTISUKIS	85
VIII FIRST GLIMPSES	95
IX JUST ONE MORE	104
X A CRY IN THE NIGHT	118
XI DUNC LEACY	129
XII A DANCE ON THE ISLAND	139
XIII CONSCIENCE IN THE TEMPLE	154
XIV THE CHIMERA AGAIN	169
XV CHIZO-SAN	173
XVI DUNC MAKES A BET	185
XVII A TALK WITH THE ADMIRAL	198
XVIII THE VERY NOBLE GENTLEMAN	208
XIX ANNA DECIDES	220
XX HENRY'S TRANSLATIONS	228
XXI STRATEGIC RETREAT	237

CONTENTS

CHAPTER		PAGE
XXII	APPARITIONS	245
XXIII	THE GIRL FROM OROVILLE	260
XXIV	MR. HELMHOLZ CALLS	268
XXV	THE SALE	280
XXVI	THE HEAVENS REPLY	291
XXVII	THE LAST NIGHT	302
XXVIII	THE VANISHING SATO	311
XXIX	A NOTE AND AN ANSWER	318
XXX	HENRY TELLS HER WHY	325
XXXI	EASTWARD BOUND	335
XXXII	PRESIDIO HILLS	342
XXXIII	BLY	351

SEED OF THE SUN

TO THE GENIUS OF FRANK NORRIS

By the stark sentries at the Gate
The deep, grey waters pour
That men may love and men may hate
On our romantic shore.

Your vision like the Western gale
Swept this broad empire through;
And who am I to tell a tale
In memory of you

Who read the hearts of common men
Beneath the mists and sun
And forged a javelin from your pen
That justice might be done?

CHAPTER I: A TOWN AND A NAME

i

EARLY spring air was gorgeous with flying kites and flying clouds over the little short town with the little short name—a name, by the way, which the Japanese inhabitants could not pronounce because the letter *l* will always be an obstacle to the fluent tongues of Nippon. The younger and more progressive referred to it as “Bry”; the conservative ones adhered to the Japanese name which they had given it when first they decided that the region round the old Bly tract was worthy of attention. Such of the villagers as could read English—these being in the majority—recognized the name Bly when they saw it, as they could, plainly painted in giant letters on the side of the packing house or less prominently displayed at either end of the Southern Pacific way-station. But to the slanting black eyes of its inhabitants Bly was, at best, a barbarian word. Indeed, as a settlement for Californians, the town of Bly had long since ceased to exist.

Sparse February rains had been blown again into the Sierras, a north wind was drying away the good moisture of heaven, and the yellow folk of Bly—those sufficiently mature to worry about Nature’s whims—were collected in Mr. Sago’s general store, there to gather wisdom from the lips of the Honorable Sago or of the still more honorable Mr. S. Oki, local secretary of the Beneficent Society. Bow-legged little women, dressed in hand-me-down American clothes, were assembled on the porch of Mr. Sago’s establishment, a respectful distance removed from the conference of their lords. Their large, broad faces bobbing

and smiling above their undersized bodies gave them more than ever the appearance of quaint toys cheaply outfitted in the style of the day.

It was Sunday in Bly. Moreover, the year had not yet awakened to the season of growing. Here, then, was an afternoon in which the most industrious people on the face of the troubled earth could breathe a little and exchange ideas to their mutual benefit. Tinny automobiles, short-nosed and noisy, were bringing in fresh loads of Asiatic farmers, father sitting majestically at the wheel, mother reverently huddled at his side, abundant offspring in the tonneau. Up and down the hilly lane, leading at right angles from the main street, stunted men with their stunted families were filing along toward the local motion-picture theater, intent upon the comic deeds of Chaplin-san, great among the long-haired ones of the West; or they were shuffling in and out of the village drug store, whose proprietor was no less a person than Minejiro Akagashi, leader of men.

Kites were flying over Bly, a yellow child with keen, flat-lidded eyes at the end of every string. Remarkable kites they were, too, as they darted and plunged in the freshening wind, making the sky gorgeous with their purple bat-like wings, demon faces and party-colored bodies. They gave to the ugly, commonplace settlement its one touch of romance. Over square-rigged store fronts and battered garages, over the far-reaching orchard rows, over the slab-sided packing house by the Southern Pacific station darted the toy devils, now poising sarcastically, now plunging as though about to remove the town of Bly by force of tooth and claw.

Mrs. Awaga, wife of the Methodist minister, stood on the porch of her husband's shabby church looking enviously across at the Bly, California, Buddhist temple, whose roof had been shingled the week before and whose brand-new surface had been treated to its first coat of paint. Just

what she was thinking concerns us not at this period in our story. Possibly her thoughts were untranslatable, for the Japanese mind is peculiar. She was a prim little woman, straighter and better proportioned than most of her countrywomen. Her appearance there was but a symbol—symbol of the new God warring with the old.

Was it symbolic, too, that she looked toward the sky to watch the play of paper demons? At that instant a little red-and-yellow kite, more spiteful than the others, was looping innumerable loops over the nubby spire of the Methodist church. It came so low that it grazed the roof. Then a gust of wind carried it up. Again it plunged—there was a clatter of wood and paper as it beat itself to death against the steeple, giving a shapeless note of color to that drab and leaky house of worship where the Reverend Professor I. Awaga had labored so long to inject a white man's religion under a brown skin.

Now this is but a passing snapshot of the town whose name, defying race and color, remains so stubbornly Anglo-Saxon. Such motorists as go bowling through this corner of Little Japan might wonder at the word "Bly" so legibly painted on the Southern Pacific station. Was there ever a Mr. Bly?

ii

On the afternoon when paper demons flew over the village of Bly, and Mrs. Awaga stared unfriendly at the pagan emblem across from her husband's church, three amiable Americans sat in a pompous New York drawing-room and struggled to talk away the effects of an old-fashioned Sunday dinner. It was one of those houses which we associate with the name of England's most maligned of queens, Victoria. It had been built in the day when downtown was uptown and when fashionable New Yorkers seemed to have borrowed the architectural tastes of Mr. P. T. Barnum, then doing business in his justly famous museum.

Aunt Julia Stannard, one of the fiercest conservatives on the Island of Manhattan, had done little to change the nature of the house which spelled "respectability" in her worldly primer. The dining-room, just beyond where the group were seated, glistened with knobby examples of the black-walnut period. True, she had attempted to modernize the drawing-room, but in doing so she had created a nightmare. Mr. Carlo Dulcimer, the reigning interior decorator, had inveigled her into having the walls paneled and tinted a faded washerwoman blue. Right there improvement had stopped at Aunt Julia's sharp command. Rosewood chairs, with pomegranates carved to bruise the back of the sitter, matched the stiff horsehair-upholstered couch, and the couch watched two cabinets through whose glass doors Dresden statuettes stared inanely. An ebony grand square piano, a Wilton carpet and a few family portraits in hard gilt frames completed the scene in which three good friends sat knee to knee making the best of their Sunday afternoon.

The aroma of Sunday cooking filled the air, giving a psychologic suggestion of funeral baked meats or of burnt offerings to a divinity in broadcloth.

"Hi-ho!" drowsed Zudie Brand, throwing back a head of honey-colored hair and opening her pretty mouth to an undeniable yawn.

"If you feel like that," smiled her widowed sister, Anna Bly, "why don't you go to bed?"

"Why don't you?" echoed the naval officer, who bore on his sleeves sufficient gold braid to indicate the rank of lieutenant commander in the United States Navy.

"I'm sorry," apologized the girl, raising her hand to shield a yawn that was already out. "They're perfect cannibal orgies, these Sunday dinners. Aunt Julia thinks you can't be a Christian unless you fill up like an anaconda on the seventh day."

"That's what makes it a day of rest," Lieutenant Com-

mander Footridge took the liberty of explaining. "When you're unable to do anything but sleep, well then——"

Zudie's hazel eyes turned involuntarily toward the heavy walnut stairs up which Aunt Julia's upholstered form had struggled toward Sabbatical coma.

Anna Bly was paying but faint attention to these light remarks, obviously exchanged for the purpose of killing time. Life in this house had been hard to endure, but she considered Zudie's remarks about Aunt Julia a trifle out of taste. She wished a lot of things for Zudie then; wished that her agile mind would learn to settle down to something; wished that she could be kinder to poor Sid Footridge, who adored her.

The two sisters, seated on either side of the naval uniform, were interesting by way of contrast. The family resemblance was scarcely distinguishable. It shone forth occasionally in a sudden expression of the face; that was all. Zudie's body was quick and agile—a dancer's body. Her features were small, and innumerable ringlets in her bright hair seemed to suggest a multitude of wayward thoughts in the little brain beneath. She was just turned twenty-one.

Anna Bly was seven years older than her sister. She had none of Zudie's sprightly prettiness. She was a beauty of heroic mold, tall, full figured and slow. Her pale skin was as pure as a child's, her eyes clear gray, her brown hair as lustrous as it was simple in arrangement. She had the look of a woman who is clean from the heart out. She was no great conversationalist. Zudie's high-pitched voice went on trippingly, full of the tailor-made accents imparted by Miss Gault's finishing school; Anna's contralto was sweet and natural. And yet they were both women to love, however differently they approached the baffling phenomenon we have learned to call life.

"If we could turn on the phonograph," suggested Zudie

Brand, "we might be able to dance down that plum pudding and hard sauce."

"Don't think of such a thing!" said Anna, coming out of her trancelike state. "If Aunt Julia should wake up and hear you dancing——"

"We might give her the Holy City," Sid Footridge was so kind as to hint.

"Hi-ho!" lamented Zudie. "If I was making the world I'd end the week with Saturday night and begin it with Monday morning. Having to sit indoors on a Sunday afternoon when there isn't enough pep in the air to commit suicide by—I'd rather be damned outright and have a good time doing it."

"Zudie!" cautioned Anna, but she smiled upon the word.

"Tell you what let's do," said Footridge, his sandy face flushing with an idea which he must have felt sure would be rejected. "I'll charter a hansom cab and we'll float round town. I've got to be aboard ship at five, but we could get a breath of air, and it might save Zudie from suicide."

This last sentence included a wink toward Anna.

"I don't want to float," said Zudie, one of her small feet thrust moodily forward to kick away a footstool. "I want to dance and gambol and be alive."

Footridge maintained the cautious air of a young man striving to say the diplomatic thing in a household torn by warring factions.

"After all," he grinned, "an old-fashioned Sunday afternoon sort of whittles up your appetite for Monday. Far as I'm concerned, I've met a lot worse horrors than your aunt's perfectly corking food."

"Every day'll be Sunday by and by," quoth Zudie pessimistically.

But noise at the front door brought diversion. A treble voice shrilling, "Aw, mother!" and a still more treble voice echoing the same summons were stilled by the acrid cau-

tion: "Can't ye be qui't now? Ye'd think an enjine was a-comin' tootin' through th' door. An' yer aunt asleep too."

"That's my bad, bad boy," whispered Anna to the visitor before she called out, "Come in, Kipps!"

The bad, bad boy appeared in the doorway looking as saintly as an Eton collar and a new blue suit of clothes, obviously for Sunday, can make a boy of eight—and growing on. He had his mother's brilliant eyes. The rest of his face gave an impression of teeth and freckles. A little girl of six, perfection's self in her squirrel-collared coat, came up at the rear and stood primly, her hands concealed in a muff. She was an unusually pretty child and had inherited her good looks from Lieut. Alexander Bly, who was killed at sea during the last month of the Great War.

"Kipps wouldn't put on his overshoes," announced the small girl, never moving from her attitude of perfection.

"Look here, mother," up spoke the accused in his own behalf, "what am I going to do with those things when they're two sizes too big for me? I have to slip along on my toes to keep 'em from falling off."

"He'll catch his death," creaked a pessimistic voice from the hall.

Dimly in the background a little wisp of an Irishwoman could be seen, her face puckered like a sour apple, her dark eyes prophesying doom.

"Aren't you old enough to know better?" asked his mother, resorting to an ancient formula. "Now come in, dear, and say good afternoon to Commander Footridge."

Kipps cast his brilliant eyes across the room. Apparently he had been unaware of an audience, and the moment was embarrassing. However, he made the most of it, and exchanged a handshake as man to man.

"Good gracious," exclaimed the sailor, "you seem to grow an inch a week, sonny! They'll need a yardstick to measure you for a uniform when you're old enough to go into the Navy."

"Mother and I have been talking that over," declared Kipps, now quite without embarrassment. "We've decided to stay out of the Navy. We aren't pacifists, though, are we, mother?"

"No, we're not pacifists, Kipps," admitted Anna, and it was her turn to be embarrassed, for she attempted to change the subject. "Sid, don't you think Nan's grown too?"

"Oh, so she has! She's tall enough now to have me at her feet."

But a compliment was all that he had for Nan. Footridge's mind was evidently upon the son of the man he had known and admired to the day of supreme sacrifice.

"Kipps," he persisted, "what's wrong with the Navy anyhow?"

"It's all right," replied Kipps, his freckles mobile with enthusiasm. "It's a he-man collection, I'll say!"

"I don't know where he picks up all that slang," interjected his mother.

"It gets in through the pores," suggested his frivolous aunt.

"But we civilians have got a lot of big jobs to tackle," Kipps was going right on. "I'm not sure whether I'll be an engineer or an editor."

"Susan," called Anna to the spectral Irishwoman in the hall, "you'd better take him upstairs and give him some dry shoes."

"We'll have to get together some time and talk these matters over," smiled Footridge.

"There's a lot of things I'd like to talk over," declared Kipps.

"Kipps, Susan's calling you!" came Nan's soft warning.

Therefore the conference had an abrupt end. Subsequent noises on the stairs indicated that Susan was hastening the delegates by the force of her small but wiry right arm.

"He's an ace," declared Footridge.

But Anna seemed not so sure.

"He's getting dreadfully wild," she said.

"If he were getting dreadfully tame you'd have cause for worry," replied the naval officer.

"It's just New York oozing out of him," said Zudie, outdone to-day with her native city. And again she yawned, "Hi-ho!"

iii

A ring at the doorbell brought animation back into the young girl's hazel eyes. As Aunt Julia's parlor maid passed through the hall Anna looked concernedly round, for an intuition warned her of who it might be.

"Mr. Lonsdale," announced the maid.

"Oh, Bunn!" cried Zudie as a slender young man, punctiliously clad for the afternoon, appeared at the door.

He was vivacious and straw colored. When he opened his mouth to laugh he showed rodent teeth, and his china-blue eyes seemed about to pop from his head.

"Hello, hello!" he breezed, shaking hands all round. "Yes, I know Footridge—how do you do? Can't stay a minute. Put on your hats, children. I'm giving a ball."

"A ball!" cried Zudie, clapping her hands.

"A regular Monte Carlo riot. Where? Over in my apartment. Now don't look stricken, Anna! Nothing rough. Respectable? Moses, how respectable! We've got six married couples—count 'em—six—to sit on the lid. If that isn't sufficient I'll bribe the night watchman to act as chaperon. He's a German, but I think he's perfectly safe."

"Bunn," interposed Anna, "when you get through with all that will you please come down to earth and tell us when and where and what?"

"I've named 'em all," he declared, counting. "Time—now. Place—my apartment. Occasion—mixed jubilee in

honor of Mrs. Bly and Miss Brand. We're running four bridge tables, Lonnie Wayle is shaking the drinks and Mrs. Van Arnum will oblige at the piano. If you don't dance you gamble. If you don't gamble you dance. If you don't do either you stay in the kitchenette and help Lonnie. Who says me nay?"

"I don't!" volunteered Zudie, her cheeks bright with excitement.

"You know we're not going out," Anna began, but the engaging Lonsdale cut in,

"That's the point. This isn't out. It's just an afternoon tea arranged especially in your honor."

"I'm wild to dance," said Zudie. "Come on, let's go!"

"You'd better go out quietly before Aunt Julia comes to," said Anna, striving to lighten her tone.

"Aw, aren't you coming, Anna?"

"No, I don't think I'd better. Susan Skelley's going out, and I ought to stay with the children."

"How about you, Sid?" asked Zudie, turning to the officer, who was now standing apart looking out of the window.

"I'm a rotten dancer," he admitted with the hard smile of one ignoring defeat. "And I don't play bridge. But you go ahead, Zudie. I'll stay and talk with Anna."

"I wouldn't be trotting off like this," she apologized. "But you can't understand, Sid, how I want to dance."

"I understand all right," he grinned.

It was an instant after Anna had cautioned her sister to come back early and make peace with Aunt Julia that Sid Footridge and Anna Bly sat beside Zudie's vacant chair and strove to talk out the tangled situation.

"Anna," began Footridge, reddening as he opened his cigarette case and closed it absent-mindedly, "I don't know what to do about Zudie."

"You'd better give her a little rope," said Anna. "My father has only been dead six months. I don't like her to

be going out to parties and dancing. But do you know, I sympathize with her sometimes. Father especially stipulated that we shouldn't go into mourning, and that makes some difference, I suppose. Just seeing black round you keeps you quieter, don't you think?"

"I suppose it does," he agreed.

He looked at her with earnest eyes. Was he thinking of her husband—the friend whose life had been blasted out less than two years ago at the discharge of one of his own depth bombs? Was he thinking of the tearless courage with which she had accepted her loss, silent, unafraid, and of how she had faced the world, spiritualized?

"I've never had the temptation," she went on, "because, I suppose, I've never cared a lot for parties. But with Zudie it has been a case of bubbles corked up and struggling to escape. Don't take it so seriously, Sid. Do you want me to encourage you?"

"A drop or two would help."

"Well, I think she cares a lot more for you than she shows. But she has to dance it out—and then, too, it's New York. If she'd marry you, Sid, and go away I'd keep a candle burning forever. You don't know what—what a peach she is really. It's just vitality struggling to express itself."

"Bless her heart," he said, "you can't blame her for flying on the golden side of life. Things have come so easy for her."

"Sid"—Anna paused and considered him before she plunged into the confidence, "things aren't going to be very easy for her or for me—from now on."

"Anna!" A new look of concern came into his homely, weather-beaten face. "You haven't struck a snag!"

"You might call it that. It's very considerate of people to say that we're staying with Aunt Julia until father's estate has been settled. But that's been settled, Sid. Mr.

Munson has been very kind and seen that every cent was paid off quietly."

"You don't mean to say——"

Anna nodded.

"The Tuxedo house was sold last week with almost every stick of furniture in it. It was quietly arranged so that it wouldn't get in the papers and give people a chance to say that we're stony broke—which we are. You see, father kept his affairs pretty much to himself—he'd been so sick and quiet for the past two years. We went right on as we always had up to the day of his death. I didn't know, and Zudie didn't know, that we were living on borrowed money. Father had been retired from business so many years I think he lost his business sense, and he'd lived so much in Japan——"

Anna's mind strayed a little and she lapsed into silence. What had Judge Brand's travels in Japan to do with his commercial failure?

"Does Zudie know all this?" asked Footridge presently.

"Yes. She's taking it in her own way. That has something to do with her restlessness, I think. She realizes, as I do, that we can't stay on here. Aunt Julia has been too kind."

The last phrase expressed it all. Too kind! A kindness that rankled, meddled, insulted, cloyed.

"I haven't a lot to offer," mumbled Sid Footridge. "But if she'd only be satisfied with my pay."

"You're a dear boy," declared Anna, patting his hand impulsively. "I think she's going to choose you, Sid. But you've got to be awfully patient with Zudie."

"She's worth it," he growled.

"Yes, she really is. I think she could marry any of a half dozen light little fellows of her set, but I'm proud to say she doesn't want to. And I'd starve, Sid, before I'd see her make such a concession."

Anna stiffened in her chair and forced a faint smile to her lips.

"I'm putting an awfully dreary face on it," she declared. "After all, it's not a matter of bread and butter. My husband"—there was always a little catch in her voice at the mention of that beloved ghost—"left some insurance, and I have his pension."

"Alec had a bit of property, too, didn't he?" asked Footridge, speaking familiarly as though Lieutenant Bly were still alive.

"Yes, there's a farm."

"Where?"

"Somewhere in California. Isn't Sacramento the state capital?" At his confirming nod she went on. "Well, it's near there. It's just outside a town named Bly. It seems that his father owned all that district in 1879, but he sold out piecemeal. There's a sixty-acre tract there planted in prunes."

"In what?" asked Footridge.

"Prunes," repeated Anna, without humor. "We've been leasing it to a Japanese farmer and getting twenty-five hundred a year."

"Of course," he calculated, "with that and the other money you can pull through."

"That's just what I've been trying to figure out. But the more I figure the worse it looks. Two women and two children trying to keep up appearances in New York on less than four thousand a year! It can't be done, Sid. It isn't as if we could live here on Aunt Julia's kindness; it isn't as if we could disappear into a side street. People we've known all our lives—it sounds weak, Sid, but I'm afraid to be poor in New York."

Sid Footridge studied her before he asked, "I wonder how you'd live away from New York?"

"I really don't know. Of course there's that farm in California."

"Oh, no!" Footridge gave a dry chuckle.

"Why not?" she asked, nettled by his tone.

"Japs," was all he said.

"Well, what difference does that make?"

Something in Anna's earnest eyes must have warned Footridge to be careful.

"It might make a lot," he answered quietly.

"I don't see how. Father lived among the Japanese a great many years of his life. Kipps was born when I was waiting for Alec's squadron to touch at Nagasaki. I think the best friend our family has ever had is Baron Tazumi."

"I suppose you know them better than I do," said Footridge with a tolerance that somehow irritated her.

"Well, what's your objection, Sid?"

"None in the world. All I want is to see you settled down in a place where you and Zudie can be happy. Of course, it's a long way to take her, but I'm as likely to be in California as in Spain or China. It isn't that——"

"Well, what is it, Sid?"

The lieutenant commander snapped to his feet and cried with a conscience-stricken air: "By George! Here it's four-twenty-one and I'm to report aboard ship at five. It's all right, Anna. I'll trust your judgment whatever way it flies."

CHAPTER II: A DECISION IN THE NIGHT

i

ZUDIE'S prolonged absence didn't make that evening easier for Anna. About six o'clock Aunt Julia—who ignored her brother's dying wish as she had ignored all his wishes—emerged from her state of coma and came forth, a righteous, stout lady in deep mourning. She strode into Anna's room and found her stitching a ruffle on a garment for little Nan. Sewing on Sunday was an infringement of household discipline, but Aunt Julia had more important misdemeanors to settle.

"Where's Judith?" she asked, her mouth drawn into a pucker.

Aunt Julia was the only living person who hadn't forgotten Zudie's baptismal name.

"She went to Mr. Lonsdale's," replied Anna. Then realizing how that would sound to Aunt Julia's blameless ear she added rapidly, "Mrs. Innes and Mrs. Crockett are giving the party—really."

"Party!" Aunt Julia sat down and a wicker chair creaked under the dead weight. "A party—on Sunday—out of a house of mourning!"

"Maybe I used the wrong word," replied Anna, struggling with her temper. "It was just a few young people."

"Isn't she coming home to supper?" the inquisitor held her to the mark.

"I don't know."

If the reply was short it was because Anna Bly could trust herself to say no more.

The speed with which Aunt Julia came to her feet did

credit to the latent energy of the fat. She undulated toward a desk telephone on the other side of the room and wasted no time in getting Mr. Lonsdale's apartment.

"Is Miss Brand there?" asked her carefully measured tones. "I should like to speak to her, please." A thunderous pause. "Is that you, Judith? I hope I haven't interrupted your fun, my dear. I have just called up to inquire if you were coming home for supper. Thank you. So good of you to let me know."

The receiver was laid back on its hook with all the gentleness of which a Christian hand is capable.

"Poor Judith!" sighed Aunt Julia. "It's a sore cross for you to bear, Anna, darling, with all the troubles that have been laid on your shoulders. It isn't as though dear brother were with us. Don't you think, Anna, that you might use your influence to remind the child of the change—the changed condition——"

It must have been something in Anna's eyes as she glanced up from her sewing. Aunt Julia's sirupy monologue came suddenly to an end. She bit her lip and vanished gloomily through the doorway.

ii

Anna had thought that she could not endure another supper alone with Aunt Julia, but she got through it surprisingly well. The heavy lady in black had evidently made up her mind to avoid the unspeakable. She was giving Zudie the silent treatment. In all her remarks she seemed to be walking clumsily round a distasteful subject. She lectured a while on woman's duty to the race. Things were coming to a dreadful pass when young people must dance on Sunday afternoon in order to enjoy themselves. Once or twice Anna thought of screaming. Instead she went on cutting cold roast beef.

Finally Aunt Julia swung into a topic far more pleasant.

Baron Tazumi had been very thoughtful in asking them to sit in a box during the Cherry Blossom Society's dinner next Wednesday night. He had been so considerate—he was always that! He had realized that in the light of their recent bereavement they would not care to make a public appearance; but he had arranged it so that they could hear without being seen, and the baron was to make the speech of the evening. He was growing so celebrated for his oratory, which accomplished so much for the ultimate brotherhood of man!

In spite of the sweetish praise Anna found herself agreeing with every word. Baron Tazumi represented no race to Anna Bly. He had been such a friend! Even though this noble Japanese had been several years his junior, Judge Brand had gone to him in the most intimate matters. The Brands first met him in Tokio during the years when the judge had lived there in our Government's service. Tazumi was an officer in the imperial army in those days, and his connections had been useful in many ways. Anna had never forgotten the service he had done her when she had been alone in Nagasaki. That was just before Kipps was born.

"Was there ever such a wonderful friend?" Anna heard her aunt asking across the somber table. "My dear, he's been like an elder brother to you."

"Indeed he has," Alec Bly's widow found herself agreeing.

"And to think that he has mastered the art of public speaking in our own tongue!" the sweet, fat tones rambled on. "Who but a Japanese could accomplish such a task? Aren't they a wonderful little people?"

Anna read in bed until after eleven; then she put out the light and tried to sleep on her problems. But she twisted

and turned between the sheets, and once or twice she thought of getting up and telephoning to Bunnie Lonsdale's apartment. Aunt Julia had been all too right in her piously worded criticism. Something had to be done about Zudie. Something—but what?

"There's no use going on like this."

She repeated it over and over like a chant, hoping to drive herself to sleep by the monotony of repetition. The door creaked softly and a step was heard on the rug.

"Ann!" came a whisper. "Ann, turn on the light!"

Anna pulled the chain of her bedside lamp and saw her sister standing there, still wearing her hat and coat. Her color was brilliant, her eyes shining. Anna had never seen her look so pretty.

"Is Aunt Julia very sore?" was the girl's first question.

"Sh!" cautioned the young widow. "You're apt to wake her. Yes, I think she's sore."

"I know it was perfectly horrid of me," said Zudie, seating herself on the edge of the bed. "But I simply couldn't break away. It was a wonderful party, but I couldn't stand a lot more like it. How much loose change have we got between us, Ann?"

"Zudie! You didn't lose any money, did you?" asked the elder sister, sitting up in bed.

"Twenty-seven dollars," replied Zudie.

"Oh, my child!"

It was a strange thing for Anna to do; Anna, who had not shed a tear when the terse military report of her husband's death had come to her. But now she buried her head in the pillows and gave way to a torrent. She came to her senses to find Zudie clinging to her, supplicating her with a thousand endearing terms.

"Ann, darling, you've got to forgive me! I'm such a fool! Oh, what have I done to hurt you so? Can't you see how much I depend on you, Ann? You're all I've got—and I'm getting to be such a rotter!"

Anna Bly ceased to weep, and held the girl close as she would have held a crying child.

"Zudie," she said, "we're both of us spoiling our lives here. It's the strain of trying to keep up in a place where we don't belong, that's driving us to all sorts of silly things."

"I know it," replied Zudie. "Sometimes I feel that I've got to get out to keep from killing Aunt Julia with one of her awful vases. Can't we go somewhere, Ann? Somewhere a long way off?"

It seemed the chosen instant for Anna Bly to speak the thing she had on her mind.

"Zudie," she said, "would you go over to my dressing table and bring me those two letters?"

The open envelopes which Zudie fished out of a top drawer were as different in appearance as peasant from bourgeois. The one was mean and flimsy; it was addressed in a schoolboy hand, purple ink being the medium, to "Mrs. A. Bly, Esq." The other bore the business letterhead of Helmholtz & Son, Real Estate Brokers, Sacramento, California.

"They came by the late mail yesterday," explained Anna. "I've been thinking them over. You see this one"—she brought a folded sheet from the more respectable of the two envelopes—"looks like a bona-fide offer. It might settle something."

She opened the letter before Zudie's eyes and read it again over her shoulder.

"Dear Madam:—In re your holdings at Bly, California, would say that the present three-year lease now held by K. Matsu expires on March fifteenth, same being in compliance with the law which requires us to lease to a new tenant.

"Would say that we may have trouble in finding a new tenant willing to pay the same rental as the outgoing party.

About fifteen acres of your tract is set out in old trees, past their full bearing.

"How would you consider a selling proposition? We have been approached by a responsible party willing to pay seven hundred dollars an acre, which is very liberal when you consider the condition in which the outgoing tenant has left the property.

"Would strongly advise a sale, as we consider this a gilt-edged proposition. The farmhouse, which has never been occupied by the farmers, is in bad condition, but our customer is willing to take all the property as is.

"Kindly notify us by wire, as the party we have in mind is anxious to occupy at once.

"Yours truly,

"CYPRIAN HELMHOLTZ."

The sisters looked at each other with a wild surmise.

"You see," said Anna, "that's forty-two thousand dollars."

"Invested at six per cent," replied Zudie, who had a way of coming down to the practical in the hour of decision—"invested at six per cent—let me see. That would mean two thousand, five hundred and twenty dollars—just about what you're getting now."

"Yes, but there'd be no worry. Real estate is never safe. Suppose there should be a tidal wave or something on that river!"

"How do you know Alec's property isn't worth more than that?" asked the suddenly practical sister.

"It's a lot of money," replied Anna, her thoughts upon a sum that looked like Golconda just then.

"What's that servant-girl-looking thing?" asked Zudie, picking up the other letter which lay upon the bedclothes. This, too, was interesting in the suggestions which its painfully rounded "o's" and religiously dotted "i's" conveyed to the reader.

"HON. MRS. MADAM,

"Dearest Sir: Undoubtedly you are surprised from me because my name cannot be aquainted to yours. Yet I are here pussuing arricultural work nearside to your neighborly propity which I adore because of its goods prunes etc.

"How would you term a lease with me for my three yrs workmanship on farm? I have been growing with trees fifteen yrs in state of Cal and can raise deliciously in American dirt.

"Please state term which would bring me in where Mr. Matsu went away. Would rent openly from you or go with you $\frac{1}{2}$ on basis. Thanks to know all these replies with your good health.

"Yours truly,

"MR. J. SHIMBA, Esq."

iv

Mr. Helmholtz's elegantly typed letter lay in Anna's lap. Zudie was holding the flimsy sheet with its purple scrawl.

"I think I prefer Mr. J. Shimba, Esquire," said the girl decisively. "It's straightforward, clear, and to the point. He wants to be brought in where Mr. Matsu went away. It's almost childishly honest."

"Yes," replied Anna, but her look was tragic, "we would be getting just what we did before."

"We would be getting two or three times as much!" cried Zudie, her voice rising to a hopeful key, which threatened to rouse Aunt Julia from her holy dreams.

"Zudie, what do you mean?" inquired Anna through a strangling embrace which her sister was tightening round her neck.

"I've got it all in a great white flash!" persisted the younger sister. "We'll not let other people use our farm to get rich on. Can't you see? Mr. J. Shimba, Esquire,

says he wants to lend us his workmanship 'one-half on basis.' Done into English, that means fifty-fifty. The farms round Sacramento are the richest in the world—everybody says so. We're going to have half of the profit, Anna!"

Anna sat back, amazed to know how a real problem could bring hope into both their hearts.

"How would we look on a farm?" she asked, wavering on the brink of that important decision.

"Splendid!" cried Zudie. "Lots of American girls—the sort we know, too—are going in for farming—making a big go of it. Letty Parrish went to her father's ranch in Wyoming and became a cowgirl. She's crazy about it. Don't you think a girl who can play tennis all day and dance all night can stand a little outdoor exercise?"

"It would be wonderful for the children," reflected Anna. Indeed Zudie's words brought her the first warming ray she had felt these many weeks.

"It would be the making of them!" declared the little enthusiast. "They wouldn't have to wear anything but overalls, and they'd be in the sun all the time. They say the California schools are excellent."

Now that her long-controlled will had once given way, Anna had a shameful feeling that she was going to cry again.

"Don't, honey!" begged Zudie, sinking on her knees by the bed. "We'll fight it out together. It will be like heaven to be in California away from all this cold and poverty and hard luck. Why, with sixty acres we're rich! And they say the Japanese are wonderful farmers. And think of the things we'll avoid! I won't have Bunnie Lonsdale and his silly crowd pulling me right and left. We won't have any servant problems—except Susan Skelley, and she's always a problem wherever we are."

"I wonder what Baron Tazumi would say to this?" Anna broke in, her mind swerving into another channel.

"We'll tackle him at the Cherry Blossom dinner," said Zudie. "We're all going, aren't we?"

"Oh, yes. Aunt Julia says—"

As though the name had summoned that righteous spirit, Aunt Julia's night-clad figure bulked large in the door.

"Good deeds are never born at midnight," she announced piously.

Which was more than enough to send Zudie to bed.

CHAPTER III: BARON TAZUMI

i

SID FOOTRIDGE dined at Aunt Julia's table on Wednesday night, and afterward sat with the ladies in their discreetly sheltered box at the Cherry Blossom Society's dinner. They arrived just before the speechmaking began, and Anna's restless mind was divided between her anxiety for Sid's and Zudie's happiness and her admiration for the talented Japanese who was to deliver the address of the evening.

It was due to the baron's thoughtfulness, they felt, that their box was so cleverly screened in artificial cherry blossoms that they could see without being seen. The banquet room upon which they looked was splendid with decorations which successfully symbolized the occasion. Several important Americans—capitalists, politicians, clergymen—were on the eve of departure for Japan, where they were to spend several weeks as guests of the Imperial Government.

"How well the Japanese do everything!" cried Aunt Julia, looking down from her flowery balcony.

How well indeed! From floor to cornice the walls were masked in boughs of pinkish bloom which framed tall temple paintings of Nippon's mighty gods. Enormous fish-skin lanterns, yellow as harvest moons and adorned with Chinese characters, glowed from the ceiling. In the center of every table was a little Japanese garden with crooked streams, rocky shores and midget cherry trees on the banks. A life-size garden with four-foot pines, a tortuous gold-fish

pond, arched bridges, stone lanterns and woodland images stood centered before the speakers' table.

"They're irresistible!" whispered Aunt Julia.

"Aren't they?" said Footridge.

He, too, was leaning curiously forward. The president had risen and was rapping for order. At the long table several famous men were recognizable—a world financier, a retired diplomat, several important bankers, a clergyman of international reputation. Their broad shirt fronts and pinkish faces contrasted sharply with the sallow complexion, domy foreheads and thoughtful features of the little giants of Nippon.

Sweeping her opera glasses along this distinguished row, Anna caught sight of Baron Tazumi, three to the left of the president's chair. She regarded him with the critical interest with which we watch our friends performing in public. The speaker was droning on in rather a dull eulogy of the cherry blossom—flower of the samurai and sacred memorial of George Washington's hatchet.

The kindly, handsome face of Baron Tazumi recalled to Anna many grateful memories. He had been such a friend! The Brands had never thought of him as a man beyond the barrier of race and religion. How open-minded he had been! How he had sympathized with and appreciated her father's aspirations! What a delicate chivalry he had shown on one or two occasions when chivalry was most needed! Zudie had been a schoolgirl when Anna's first baby was born. Alec had been at sea and her father away on an expedition at Hokkaido. Tazumi, then an officer in the imperial army, had stood apart, unobtrusive and unseen, and arranged everything.

He had brought a skillful doctor from Tokio; he had sent the women of his mother's household to attend her; and when the boy was born and Anna could smile again and look round her she had found by her bed a gift of beautiful significance. It was a straight little pine tree in

a porcelain bowl, and on the body of the bowl there was painted in simple, lovely lines the picture of a rising sun, just peeping above the ocean edge. The pine for long life, the rising sun for a hope newborn! Anna's second child was born in Baltimore two years later. She had had good care there, and many friends, but Tazumi's chivalrous thoughtfulness had been felt again. Once more the little pine and the rising sun had been brought to the hospital. It had been carried from Washington by one of the baron's servants.

ii

The president closed his remarks and gave way to the toastmaster. Anna heard something of what this able, nervous gentleman said. It was eminently fitting, he pointed out, that the flower of American civilization—with a nod toward the distinguished gentlemen about to visit Japan—should go forth to Nippon to taste the delightful hospitality of that island empire; especially fitting indeed because at no time in the history of the two nations had petty intrigue and selfish journalistic exploitation threatened so much harm to the two peace-loving peoples.

Then a learned Japanese educator took the floor. He had a lean and thoughtful face, but he spoke English incoherently, with innumerable hisses and a Japanese tendency to turn every "l" into an "r." Anna thought she heard the names of Commodore Perry and of William Jennings Bryan and of Theodore Roosevelt.

Her mind wandered again. What was meant by that reference to meddling politicians and selfish newspapers? What could be gained by trouble with Japan? Her father had loved and admired the little people; had always spoken of their pitiful hunger for land—sixty millions of people farming rocky and mountainous islands with an arable area far smaller than that of California! Wasn't there room on

this green earth for all its patient, well-deserving tribes?

She emerged from her reverie to see Baron Tazumi coming to his feet, a figure of a very noble gentleman. His skin was paler, his eyes rounder than the average of his race. With his tightly twisted little mustache he appeared more like a Frenchman than an Oriental. On a ribbon below his lawn tie hung suspended the Order of the Rising Sun.

Mrs. Stannard and her nieces brought their hands together, the warmth of their hearts lending energy to their applause. Who could hold a prejudice against such a man? Anna's subconscious mind was asking that question as the baron acknowledged the applause with a dignified smile, and his shining eyes, which seemed to see everything, glanced swiftly up toward the box where Mrs. Stannard's party was sitting.

"My friends of the Cherry Blossom," he began in his careful Oxford English, "upon the day when Commodore Perry sailed into our harbor, as romantic a voyager as Marco Polo into the enchanted realms of the Grand Khan, he brought to Japan at once a great treasure and a great responsibility. The eyes of Nippon were opened wide as the sun upon her flag. For twenty-five hundred years we had built our civilization, stone upon stone, mound upon mound. Under the beneficence of our wise and mighty rulers we had perfected our little empire until no humble street was without its beauty spot, no ell of ground without its sacred memory. Self-contained, self-supporting—self-satisfied, I will admit—we had reared, all unknown to the other world, a race of artists, poets, statesmen and soldiers. Long before the day of Charlemagne we had had our Renaissance; before a Norman duke had carried the sword of culture into savage Britain we had borrowed the craftsmanship of China and India's religious inspiration.

"And yet in the age of steam and electricity Nippon lay a-dreaming, old as her hills and young as the new-sprouted

rice. What had she but the honor of her chivalry, the sanctity of her shrines? Then Perry knocked at the door of Japan—or it was like the clangor of some brazen gong outside a temple *torii*.

“‘Awake, daughter of Amaterasu! Seed of Yamato, germinate anew! Why do you dream forever among your ancient groves, forgetful of your share in mankind’s greater work? A new sun is risen, and with it a new day. Progress calls you into its brotherhood to make you one with all mankind. America, ever-generous giver, has come with the gift of all the science you have neglected. But with that gift is a heavy responsibility. You must learn that you may teach. China, Korea, the stately lands of India lie sodden and in darkness. Daughter of Nippon, to you I bring the golden key. Will you accept it and go forth with us into the world?’”

The speaker paused, and there lay over the large room that crystal-clear silence which the orator values more highly than applause.

“My friends, you see Japan to-day. We make no superior claims, for in our hearts we are very humble. But I ask you to-night, my brothers and sisters of the great republic, have we done well or ill?”

“Well! Well!” echoed the cry from hundreds of throats as the golden lanterns above seemed to sway with the storm of applause.

“No people,” went on the speaker as soon as silence was restored, “can leap in a generation from the age of Charlemagne to the age of Roosevelt without committing its blunders. Yet no one can say that Japan has not tried with all the strength of a stout heart. And America has been always with us; always the wise and patient teacher, shielding us from our enemies often; and more often from our worst enemy, which has sometimes been ourselves. Thanks to your great republic, Japan has learned to stand upon her

feet and to join America in her benevolent guardianship of the Pacific.

"And when the world was shattered by the earthquake of war, Japan, grown into a constitutional monarchy like England, never hesitated to join forces against the German spoiler. Almost before the Western front was ablaze we had advanced on Kiao-chau and pulled the Prussian spear-head from the side of China. In the cause of humanity we unsheathed the sword of the samurai that the world should be freed forever of militarism. For we too had felt the canker of Prussian intrigue and propaganda.

"Now it is over. Germany has not forgiven Japan—and why should she? All during the war her secret agents were at work against us in the United States, in Canada, in England. Disloyal American newspapers have seized upon that siren song, and to-day you hear it harped in many sharps and flats the length of the Pacific Coast. A handful of our humble toilers, working peacefully in coöperation with California farmers, are characterized as a menace. To a few political agitators—fortunately few in this free land—any poor Japanese cobbler, blissfully unaware of what it all means, becomes a yellow peril." [Laughter.]

"Now political demagoguery and yellow journalism are not peculiar to America or to any other nation. The press in Japan is free also, and there is much loose talking on both sides of the water. But these, my friends, are but little clouds of dust. The heart of humanity beats on, human blood runs the same under all skins. Our Japanese pride may be wounded sometimes, but we have two saving graces—a sense of honor and a sense of humor. We have passed out of the age of superstition. We are no longer afraid of goblins. And we know that the destinies of America and Japan are too closely welded, our aims and ideals too nearly identical, for our people to be butchered to make a Sunday supplement."

Glancing for an instant through the brilliant cavern of a room, Anna knew that she would never forget the picture. Gentlemen in spotless evening dress, ladies with naked shoulders and flashing jewels, over all the big fish-skin lanterns and the bowers of pinkish blossoms. The two civilizations, Western and Eastern, were smoothly blended together, speaking the same language, exchanging high thoughts in perfect understanding. The baron was speaking on international affairs—the open door in China, Japan's part in carrying the torch of civilization into Mongolia, trade relations in key ports. These phrases meant little to her, save that the man who spoke them was strong and just and that his way was a good way. He had a plan for reducing armies and navies, for removing the curse of militarism forever from the world; he had a plan for a better exchange of ideas between the two great Powers of the Pacific.

The tables rumbled, the cherry blossoms shook, the lanterns swayed as the gifted gentleman resumed his seat. Aunt Julia split her glove and Anna clapped until her palms hurt. Only Footridge remained passive. When she turned toward his chair she found him sprawling back, his hands in his pockets.

"Wasn't it lovely!" beamed Aunt Julia, her large face flushed with excitement.

"Yes, yes! Wasn't it!" agreed Footridge, and his sarcastic tone brought a glare from Zudie which caused Anna's heart to sink again.

"We simply must talk to him!" declared Aunt Julia as soon as the dinner was over and the eloquent little man was surrounded by a ring of congratulatory hands.

"I'll remind him that we're here," volunteered Zudie.

"Let me!" broke in Footridge.

As a result the two of them disappeared into the mezza-

nine. But Baron Tazumi must have sensed their wish, for they were scarcely gone before his trim little figure stood between the curtains of the box.

"Mrs. Stannard, how do you do?" he began, raising her hand almost to his lips. "It was so gracious of you to come. I hope you didn't find me too—what do you say so well?—too long-winded!"

"You were superb!" avowed the large lady. "I could sit for years and listen to you!"

"Would that I were immortal!" he smiled, twinkling toward Anna. "What greater pleasure than to spend years being enjoyed by you!"

Bowing his small, well-formed body over Anna's hand, he added deprecatingly: "I hope your distinguished aunt does not underrate my figure of speech. And how have you been?"

"Oh, very well," lied Anna. "I couldn't feel anything but inspired after hearing the fine things you've said."

"I was speaking directly to your box, hoping all the time that you were here to listen," he assured her, and there was a charming simplicity in the way he said it.

Through the curtains a group of middle-aged people could be seen waiting to greet the lion of the evening.

"These are our distinguished tourists to Japan," he informed the ladies. "Couldn't I persuade you to meet them—just for a word?"

"Oh, I know Mr. Kohl and Doctor Greet," declared Aunt Julia, proud of an acquaintance with every New Yorker worth remembering. "Senator Jascomb I have met."

She said nothing about her duties toward a house of mourning as the prospective guests of the Mikado were ushered into her presence.

Ignatius Kohl, the financier, the Reverend Doctor Greet, the pulpit orator, and Senator Jascomb formed an agreeable group round the ladies. Ignatius Kohl, a beetle-browed, dark man, had less to say than the others. His

profession had taught him discretion. Senator Jascomb, too, maintained a diplomatic aloofness. It was the popular pulpit orator who spoke most feelingly.

"I have never visited Japan," his orotund voice rolled forth, "though the duty of my church lies there. To see is to know, Mrs. Stannard. It will be my privilege to view that flowery land with unprejudiced eyes and bring back its message to America."

Aunt Julia sat entranced by that continuous flow of rhetoric. Anna moved restlessly toward the mezzanine. Her mind was on Zudie and Sid. She liked the manner of their disappearance, and hoped again for their happiness. As she stood outside the curtain, her eyes strained across the vacant carpet, she was aware of Tazumi at her side.

"I've been thinking of you all day," he began in his pleasant voice—a characteristically Japanese voice, which seemed to carry a high overtone of politeness against a virile bass.

"I'm glad of that," admitted Anna. "It's been so long since we've seen you."

"I've become a great gadabout," he smiled. "See America first—that's the motto, isn't it?"

"Baron," said Anna on an impulse, "Zudie and I have decided to give up New York and go to California."

"Splendid!" he said. "Nothing is so delightful as California."

"We're not going for pleasure. I wanted to talk to you about it."

"What are your plans, if I might ask?"

"We're thinking of living on my husband's farm. It's near Sacramento. That's the state capital, isn't it?"

Tazumi smiled.

"May I call to-morrow afternoon?" he asked a little hastily, because the guests of Japan were about to leave the box.

When Sid Footridge brought Zudie back to her aunt one look at his face told Anna that Zudie had not been kind.

"Good night, Mrs. Stannard," said Footridge punctiliously, after he had escorted them to their car. "It's been such a pleasure."

There was no pleasure in his honest eyes.

"Do let us take you as far as your club!" urged Mrs. Stannard.

"Thanks awfully." Sid Footridge stood more irresolutely than a prospective commander in the Navy should ever do. "Awfully good of you—fact is, there are a couple of men I've got to talk to right here in the hotel. Good night. It's been a great pleasure."

"I hope he isn't gambling," was Aunt Julia's way of dismissing Footridge's peculiar behavior.

All the way home she entertained her nieces with Biblical quotations from the lips of the Reverend Doctor Greet.

It was not until the young women were locked in their adjoining rooms that Anna dared ask, "Zudie, what have you been doing to Sid Footridge?"

"I'll not stand him any more!" declared the impetuous sister. "Do you know what he called the Cherry Blossom dinner? 'A press-agent show for a lot of hand-picked tourists!'"

"But, Zudie," implored Anna hopelessly, "what if he did? There's nothing personal about that. You can't let a difference of opinion come between you."

"He makes it a point to disagree with everything I think," Zudie said in the quiet tones of anger. "It doesn't matter what side I'm on. And I'm through with Sid Footridge! Through!"

She banged the door as she went into her room.

CHAPTER IV: HENRY JOHNSON

i

BARON TAZUMI had elected Thursday for his call upon Anna. Thursday afternoon shortly after luncheon Anna heard Susan Skelley's sour voice holding its own in public debate at the street entrance. Susan's interference with the ordering of her aunt's household was a continual irritation. But a faithful friend and servant of many years' standing is difficult of reproof, and the wispy Irish-woman who had been young and marriageable when she entered Judge Brand's establishment, there to pucker into spinsterhood, was subject to little discipline from the young women she had waited upon and loved since their babyhood.

"What d'ye think ye are, the king o' China, to come ringin' at the front door?" her rasping voice was going on, directed toward an invisible intruder. "Where d'ye learn yer manners from?"

"From quite a number of sources, madam," an educated accent was making reply. "If you think it necessary for me to show a college diploma I am afraid I shall have to disappoint you."

Something in the lecturing voice outside reminded Anna of Baron Tazumi and filled her with apprehensions.

"Susan!" she called, and when Susan's bleak face appeared, "What's the matter?"

"There do be wan o' thim Eyetalian Chinees outside, Mrs. Bly."

"What does he want?"

"Ef he knows himself, he won't tell. He's here for no good, that's sure, an' there's his car-r-rd."

Susan, who was helpless without her spectacles, handed over a business card legibly printed, "Zelwitz Window Cleaning Co."

"He's the window cleaner," said Anna. "Send him to the service entrance."

That should have dismissed the matter, but a little later, when the talkative stranger made his appearance from the rear, he proved to be sufficiently odd to justify a second look and then a third. He was quite different from anything she had seen in New York's parade of undesirable aliens. In costume he recalled a figure out of *La Bohème*, but the greasy Windsor tie and the suit that flapped loosely over his tall, bony form somehow suggested the Bowery. The face under a thatch of long wiry black hair was grotesque as it was pathetic. It was as though two incomplete faces had been joined rather clumsily and made to serve as one.

No wonder Susan Skelley had classified him as an Eye-talian Chinee! His long, flat-lidded eyes were a brilliant gray, and their grayness contrasted with the brownish yellow of his skin. His nose was bulbous and looked as though it had been stuck on between his wide cheek bones as an afterthought in a bad job of assembling left-over features. To his long chin there clung a grayish, mossy growth of beard.

"You have come about the windows?" asked Anna, now remembering that Aunt Julia had left most definite instructions.

"Oh, yes—about the windows!" He said this absent-mindedly.

"Come upstairs, please, and I'll show you where to begin."

As she guided him up to the second floor Anna had the feeling of one conducting a harmless lunatic and lacking

faith in his harmlessness. The man followed obediently enough with his bucket and rags.

"You'll begin here," she told him, indicating Aunt Julia's sewing room. "And when this is done Susan will tell you where to go next."

The queer person stalked over to a window and ran his sensitive, dirty fingers across the pane. He gazed at the fresh sample thus collected, and every line in his tall, skinny figure seemed to express intellectual detachment.

"Fate arranges things quite well at times, if you let her alone," he began, as though continuing a lecture. "What more pleasant, after all, than window washing? To the philosopher it symbolizes the act of preparing the inner soul to look out and behold. Of course in weather like this the art has its perils, but what art has not? One is apt to catch influenza, for instance. Nothing is more unsanitary than sitting on a window ledge with one's legs in Florida and one's lungs in Alaska. And yet there is a certain universality about the feeling, don't you think?"

Anna stood irresolute, not sure whether to laugh or call the police.

"From your window, too, one can view the faults of American society—your very pompous streets and your rather ugly back yards. You have never learned to make the back yard an object of beauty, as they do in Japan."

"Then you're a Japanese?" asked Anna in spite of herself.

The man roused curiosity, whatever else could be said of him.

He stooped and dipped a rag gingerly in the pail, wrung it out and caressed it between his palms before replying.

"I am a chimera," he said.

The look he gave her was so sardonic and so sad that she was fain to overlook his eccentric impertinence and probe the mystery which he seemed to be holding buttoned under his shiny coat. But he had set himself to his task

of polishing the window. He went at it minutely, with the air of an art collector restoring a damaged Rubens.

He continued to work on the second floor during the early part of the afternoon. Susan Skelley, almost cheerful in the rôle of amateur sleuth, kept her gimlet gaze upon him as he passed from room to room. Once or twice he could be heard venturing forth into new essays; then Susan's bitter tone would cut in like steel and he would be silenced.

ii

The chimera, bucket and rags in hand, was descending the stairs just in time to spoil the picture when Baron Tazumi called. Even the nobleman's politeness was insufficient to prevent his staring a second time at the seedy philosopher.

"Did you ever see such a curious person?" asked Anna as soon as Tazumi had been seated.

"They are unusual in New York," he admitted, with the air of one classifying a stray tropic bird.

"They?"

"Eurasians, you understand. Undoubtedly you remember seeing them in Japan—the fruits of intermarriage. Very good fruits often, too. Of course, when inferiors of any race come together the results can't be superior, can they?"

In any other man this explanation might have seemed protesting too much. But Tazumi had a delightful way of scattering information, as a page might scatter flowers in the destined path of a queen.

"The specimen you have here," he added after a discreet glance into the next room, "is quite unique. Harmless? Let us hope so. He dabbles in radicalism. Who knows what trouble he might make for your country and mine? But I do not think he can accomplish much. Such men stand in their own light."

"He's a little mad, I think," said Anna. "Or maybe we have Socrates washing our windows. Anyhow, he's pathetic. He seems so—what shall I say?—so far from home."

"Ah, my dear Anna-san"—Tazumi had addressed her in the Japanese manner since he first knew her as a little girl—"Anna-san, the Japanese are never far away from home."

He gave her no chance for further questioning, but chatted amiably on a number of harmless topics. In a half hour of pleasant dialogue there was no hint of last night's confidence until he plunged suddenly into the subject.

"Anna-san, I hope you will not resent this brotherly question. But what has turned your mind toward farming in California?"

She told him a little of her unsettled affairs, and of her conference with Zudie, which had set their faces toward the ranch on a far-away river.

Tazumi smiled again.

"You haven't learned your California," he said teasingly. "And I have brought you a textbook. We must locate that farm, you know."

His textbook proved to be a folding map of California, which he brought from his pocket and spread before her.

"We can't plunge into the unknown, can we?" he insisted, as his delicate forefinger found Sacramento and traced out the tortuous course of a little river flowing toward a great one. "Is it near any small town?"

"The town's named after me," she said with a certain pride.

"Bly? Oh, yes! I've heard of the little place. It was christened for your—your husband's family, was it not?"

"Alec's father owned most of that region once."

"So he did—once."

Tazumi never looked up. His forefinger was passing cautiously along to locate the trifling spot marked with the name of a forgotten pioneer.

"And here you are!" he chuckled. "Now tell me, Anna-san, is there a comfortable house on the premises?"

"There's a very nice little house," she explained. "It's been vacant for six years. The last white family that farmed the place lived there, but Alec arranged that the real-estate man should look out for it. Alec always had an idea that we might move out there, you know."

"Yes," replied Tazumi in the respectful tone he always used when Alec was mentioned. "And now, Anna-san, will you listen to advice from an old friend?"

"I've so wanted you to advise me, baron!" she cried, truly delighted.

"Don't try to farm that place yourself. Either lease it again or—sell it."

"Why shouldn't Zudie and I work it ourselves?" she objected. "We're strong, and there isn't a thing for us to do in the world but make the place pay."

"That's what troubles me," he said. "Can you make it pay?"

"We're working it on shares with a Japanese farmer," she informed him. "The Japanese have been able to pay us twenty-five hundred a year for it, so there's no reason why we shouldn't do twice as well at least."

"Hm!" He looked serious. "The Japanese and the whites, you understand, are different people. Much as I admire American ladies, I must admit—shall I say it?—that they are better in the drawing-room. And, to be fair, no Japanese lady of your station would go into the fields to work. To do your share on the farm you must compete with Japanese peasant women. That will mean work from daylight to dusk, digging ditches, mending fences, splitting wood. I should hate to think of your growing bent in a year, of your pretty hands becoming red and swollen."

"I can always afford to hire some one for the heavy work," she pointed out.

He laughed.

"How like an American lady!" Then coming rapidly back to the seriousness of his topic. "My advice to you, Anna-san, is to sell."

"I've had one offer," she admitted. "But I think I can do better by farming the land."

"What was the offer?" he asked, eying her keenly.

"Seven hundred dollars an acre."

"Hm! I think I know of some American gentleman who could do better by you than that. Who is your agent?"

"Helmholtz & Son."

"I know of them," said the baron. "What do you say to my wiring them to communicate with the firm I have in mind?"

Anna shook her head.

"It's awfully good of you, baron," she said. "But I can't tell you how Zudie has set her heart on that farm, and it will be a godsend for the children. I think Alec would have preferred us to do it this way. We can't stay here, you know."

"He would have known best," replied the baron reverently.

He sat a while studying the map of California, passing his slender finger along the twisted lines representing rivers. At length he looked up and asked, "Anna-san, won't you be advised?"

"It's just what I want," she reassured him.

"With the intention of disregarding it. Perhaps you'll think me impertinent, but it is my sincere wish for your good that urges me——"

"I know you've always felt that," she answered, grateful for his unselfish devotion.

"You should be in the world, Anna-san. You are not made to live on a frontier, competing with peasants. You are a lady of quality. You should be again at the head of a great house."

Anna glanced at him to read the look of earnestness on

the tawny face from which the mask of Asia seemed to have fallen away.

"You mean I ought to—marry again?" she asked.

"Why not? You have all the talents of the home-making woman. You are too young to go into exile."

"I'll be twenty-nine next June," she smiled sadly.

"In America that is youth. You should make up your mind to resume life where it was broken off. I should like to think of your deciding to do that."

"No"—she shook her head—"I don't want even to think of it. It seems only yesterday that Alec was with me. I couldn't forget like that, you know."

"Your memory does you honor," said Tazumi. "Perhaps it is just as well. You are too fine a woman to take your life lightly. My mother was like that. She never married again after my father's death."

She could not restrain a look of admiration for the fine-grained little Asiatic who had always been so true to the best traditions of a great people. She wondered what delicate instincts of chivalry had kept him a bachelor so long, for Tazumi was past his forty-fifth year.

"How about your California adventure?" The high overtones of his voice above the virile bass seemed to raise his spirit from its momentary sadness. "Since you are determined to be a farmerette—I believe that is the word—you must let me do my small part toward making your travels pleasant."

"How nice of you!" she told him.

"When are you going?"

"Just two weeks from Saturday."

"Very soon, isn't it? Let me arrange for some of my Japanese friends to call and be of service while you are in San Francisco. Will you be stopping over there?"

"I—I think so."

She had not considered the matter.

"I'll let Mr. and Mrs. Otisuki know of your coming.

You'll be interested in them, since they have accomplished what so many of my countrymen wish to do—become good Americans. An interesting fellow, Otisuki—self-made man; almost a Yankee, I might say."

Anna thanked him again, and was sorry to see him about to go so soon.

"You'll let me see you again before you leave, I hope," he entreated as they shook hands.

iii

He had no sooner gone than Anna was aware of the curious Eurasian standing in one of the dining-room windows at an angle overlooking the drawing-room. She had a disagreeable sensation of having been spied upon, but her annoyance gave way to pity when she glanced at the starved figure silhouetted in the afternoon light. What contrary winds had blown this piece of flotsam into port? Tazumi had spoken of him as a dangerous radical. To associate radicalism with the Japanese character was in itself an anomaly. Curiosity stirred her as she went into the dining-room, resolved to question him again. But the Eurasian was the first to speak.

"Mrs. Bly," he suggested as he stood balanced on the window sill, "would you permit me to make a few sketches of you, just as you are, in that charming costume?"

"Then you're an artist as well as a philosopher," she laughed.

"I do almost everything badly," he replied as he shambled down. "Sometimes I do sketches for a Tokio fashion magazine. They are interested in aping foreign styles. Once in a while they pay me, but my work is worth nothing."

"For an egotist," she said, giving candor for candor, "you underrate yourself terrifically."

Somewhere out of his scarecrow clothes the Eurasian

had brought a sketch pad and pencil. Twisting his queer eyes from Anna's face to the pad in his hand, he worked rapidly, and as he worked he talked.

"It is impossible to underrate me," he said with a sarcastic smile. "I represent zero at par. Now with Baron Tazumi it is different." The last remark justified her suspicions as to the man's eavesdropping. "Oh, yes, I was listening. He is a very noble man. Too noble, I should say. Universal brotherhood is his hobby. Splendid hobby."

"He informs me that you are a socialist," said Anna, now anxious to draw him out.

"Well," he drawled, "in me you see the brotherhood exemplified. By the way, Mrs. Bly, you can dismiss me any time I become too impertinent. I'm resigning from this window job to-day. I have sufficient money to keep me in books, tobacco and inferior liquor for a month. Just tell me when I shall get out."

"I wouldn't send you away for anything," she assured him, now quite intrigued with his topsy-turvy conversation.

"Well, as I was saying, in me you see the brotherhood of man exemplified, an experiment in flesh and blood. In the police courts I am known as a hobo; but it would be more elegant to call me a chimera—the dragon's tail of the Orient fastened to the goat's head of Europe. I am a very unsatisfactory beast, Mrs. Bly. All the time the European goat in me is striving to butt forward, the dragon's tail is curling round some ancient tradition and pulling me back.

"The brotherhood of man created me, Mrs. Bly, and as a machine I'm not worth the powder to blow me up. I never stick long at anything. I've been a revolutionist in India, a student in Massachusetts, a water carrier with the British Army at Saloniki. I fail to synchronize, as the saying goes. I have a bad habit of seeing both sides of a question. I quit the Indian revolution because I couldn't

stand the Bombay bombast. I failed as a student because I hated the rubbish they taught me under the name of economics. I deserted from the British Army because—well, I disagreed with the commanding general. And see me now! Why am I here?"

Anna frankly had no idea.

"If I were all American now, I'd be ashamed of what I am doing. And if I were all Japanese, I would be sitting in the Middle Ages, perfectly satisfied with myself."

"Japan is not in the Middle Ages," protested Anna.

"I suppose Baron Tazumi has told you that," growled the Eurasian tramp. "Japan has learned how to wear a dress suit and to say hello over the telephone and to shake hands American fashion. Therefore it makes no difference that she gets down on all fours before the picture of the Mikado and teaches her children in the public schools that Jinmu Tenno, her first emperor, was grandson of the sun goddess and that the Mikados are sun gods still."

iv

"Of course Christianity——" began Anna, but was cut off.

"Christianity! My dear lady, I was a Christian before I became a socialist and got myself kicked out of Nippon. I'm still a Christian, I suppose, when I'm not drunk or planning a new heaven and a new earth. Christ was the father of democracy. With all its faults and vices, this modern world is still ruled by him. And it's this world that Japan is stepping into with a firm conviction that she can be received as an equal without in the least believing in equality. My dear lady, Christ and Shinto must come together on my island and fight the battle out before we can talk business with the modern world."

"But you surely don't believe that the Japanese are our inferiors!" Anna broke in.

"No one who knows them thinks they are inferior to anybody. It's not a matter of inferiority. It's a matter of difference."

All during this lecture the anomaly had been sketching busily in his little pad. The situation seemed so idiotic—standing for her portrait before a radical half-breed window washer—that Anna moved at last to go and leave him to his theories.

"Just another instant," he begged. "The likeness will be a failure, but some day you may be proud to have a sketch signed by Henry Johnson. I may be famous the day after I am hanged."

"Henry Johnson!"

The commonplace American name came involuntarily to her lips.

"My rubber stamp," he explained. "I took it because it was easy—I detest difficult things. And here is the very poor likeness, Mrs. Bly."

Henry Johnson tore a sheet from his pad and handed it over. It was, as he had promised, a very poor likeness, but it was drawn with a skill of line which indicated that the Eurasian was an artist, whatever else he might disclaim for himself.

"It's really quite lovely," she admitted. "You aren't going to give it to me?"

"Oh, defer payment," he suggested with a courtly bow, "until some time when I need the money. I'll have fifteen dollars coming to me to-night when I tender my resignation to the Zelwitz Window Cleaning Co. And if you'll please sign here——"

He brought one of Mr. Zelwitz's blanks from his pocket and indicated the line where she should place her signature.

"Fourteen windows duly purified so that the beauty of your home may exchange views with the light of heaven.

Mr. Zelwitz is a great idealist, I am sure, or he would never have adopted this profession."

She signed the slip and saw Henry Johnson pick up his flop-brimmed hat before he offered her another surprise.

"Mrs. Bly," said the oddity, "permit me the privilege of the empty wind. What I am about to say amounts to nothing, and I will expect you to disregard it."

"Then why not save your breath?" she asked, having decided to humor him as a court jester.

"I have never done that."

Suddenly his whole manner changed and his irreconcilable features took on a look of prophecy as he said, "Tazumi was honest."

"Honest?"

She stood back a little, half afraid of what he would say.

"Let me join him in that good advice. Don't go to California."

She might have questioned his impudent admonition, but the Eurasian tramp gave her no opportunity. Before she could call him back he had shambled away. His seamy shoes rattled down the rear passage like a fateful warning.

CHAPTER V: THE OLD WIFE AND THE NEW

i

NOW the little town of Bly, which Baron Tazumi had indicated on the map with the point of his delicate forefinger, sits near the river bank and not many miles distant from the busy city which the people of Nippon call Ofu—City of Cherries—and the long-haired ones of the West call Sacramento. Aviators, flying over from the government fields beyond, look down on the huddle of mean buildings in the midst of neatly squared orchards and plantations, and as they pass over they say, “Japtown!” and let it go at that.

The casual Californian, motoring between his farm and the city, gets a more human view of this modern phenomenon; a transplanted race with their elfin peculiarities—different from us, as though the people of Mars had plumped down upon America and had schooled themselves to wear American shoes on their three-legged bodies. Superficially the town of Bly, surrounded by orchard and vineyard, differs little from the average rural village. It has a hill to give variety to its short main street, and down an alley sloping toward the river are still relics of the Chinese, who lived in crazy barracks until they were pushed aside by the more persistent race. Square-topped store fronts line the main street. There is one dilapidated church, and across the way a handsomer and more modern edifice is in the course of construction.

Here in Bly you will find nothing of the fairyland charm, the quaintness of composition, the age-old prettiness which we have learned to associate with Japan. The stores, it is

true, are marked with the delicate Chinese characters which never disfigure a building as our Roman letters often do. Brown, slant-eyed men in baggy overalls, rough sweatshirts and swamper's boots, muddy from the irrigation ditches, come slouching in toward the general store. In and out of the local garage small tinnish automobiles are charging noisily all day long. Little brown men sit at the wheel and gossip of grease cups and gear shifts in the language of Nippon.

In a vacant lot over by the railway station which fronts the main street and is the center of the town, Japanese boys of sixteen practice baseball during the dull season of the year. They hold their bats quaintly, but their batting average is fair, and they raise a great hullabaloo as they scramble back and forth contesting for a lofty fly. Occasionally they revert to the language of the long-haired people and cry, "Rotten!" or "Line 'er out!" Squatty women, leading small children and carrying smaller ones, cross the road mincingly on their turned-in toes. Most of these women are cowled under great blue sunbonnets; some of them go bareheaded beneath the leaden skies. The children are often pretty—prettiest when their gowns are of the crazy-quilt Japanese printed cotton, even though they are cut in a bad imitation of American style.

At the sight of a man the women bend their bodies stiffly from the waist up, accompanying the gesture with a folding of the hands and a lowering of the eyes. In Bly, California, the male is lord. Here the names of Mrs. Pankhurst and Mrs. Blatch are never mispronounced for the very good reason that they are never mentioned.

Now the strip of land known even to the Japanese as the Bly tract lies on the river verge a good sling's shot from the town of Bly; and it was on a bright Saturday morning

early in March that Mr. Shimba, Esquire, came slopping in from the fields, his boots caked with the mud of river loam. The rain god had been moderately liberal, he concluded, since there had been two good days of downpour, and only at dawn had the brisk north wind managed to drive the clouds toward Fresno. But the ground would be too wet for working yet a while unless the dry wind continued. The prune trees were budding healthfully and blossoms were appearing in the four-acre strawberry patch. It would be a fair year for him and for the strange white woman who had insisted on occupying the ranch house.

It was about time for the noon meal when Shimba plodded over irrigation ditches and through burgeoning orchards. He was a knotty little man with a face all puckered in curly lines. His front teeth protruded, giving him the appearance of a brindle bulldog. His ears, which were reddened with sunburn, stood out straight under his battered golf cap. Rather gracelessly he wore the mask of Asia, and through the slitlike eyeholes living fires glittered constantly, fed forever by his restless thoughts.

He paused for breath in the wagon road and looked round him. Across the brownish river water the landscape showed green as emerald, with a broad velvet-brown patch in the center, where Japanese farmers had been breaking soil for potato planting. Above the orchard tip, on the near side of the stream, he could see the jig-saw architecture of the Bly farmhouse, which had lain deserted, according to contract, for many years. Soon this American woman would be coming here to live. Probably she would begin by throwing money away on expensive house paint—another example of American foolishness.

Shimba grunted and was about to go his heavy way when a moving spot of dirty yellow, slinking among the tree trunks, caught his eye. A coyote! Shimba's heart stood still as the cowardly little animal, keenly aware that his enemy was unarmed, stopped at a safe distance to mock

him with sharp eyes and lolling tongue. It was just an instant, but in that instant Shimba knew that the cursed animal was laughing at him. His mouth wide open, his ears peaked, he laughed the silent laugh of fiends, then disappeared as though the earth had swallowed him up.

"The fox woman will come again!" said Shimba, struggling in vain with the cold fear that was in his heart.

A hundred ancestors were speaking to Shimba in the voice of superstition. This animal was indeed a fox. Now one must be poorly read in the folk lore of Yamato not to realize that the fox is a crafty beast, cunning in the wiles of enchantment. A demon by nature and the friend of demons, he loves to lurk near the houses of honest people, awaiting his chance to crawl under their finger nails and possess their souls until they dream strange dreams and gibber in the voice of the fox.

Shimba had cause for worry. Only last summer he had divorced his wife, Hana-san, an old woman of thirty-four. Mr. Akagashi, of the drug store, had suggested the separation, justly deciding that Shimba was wasting his days with a sterile mate. Mr. Akagashi had seen to everything, drawn up the papers, engaged a lawyer, obtained a decree according to the law of the long-haired ones. Hana-san was about to be sent to So Ko, Port of Mulberries, which the long-hairs call San Francisco. But what then?

The fox, enchanted devil that he is, had crept in through the window! Hadn't Shimba heard him in the night, rattling the panes in imitation of the north wind? Hadn't he heard Hana-san talking strangely in her corner? Hadn't he struck a light to find her huddled on the floor, squeaking and gibbering in the voice of the fox?

It had been an embarrassing situation for Shimba to discover the woman whom he had just divorced mad as a hatter and unwilling to quit his premises. But the able Mr. Akagashi and the elegant Mr. Oki had taken the matter in hand for him and shipped Hana-san to Sacramento, where

she had been put in the care of a very wise woman, expert in the driving out of foxes. The former Mrs. Shimba had earned her keep as dishwasher in an American restaurant. That arrangement had been satisfactory enough, but only yesterday the rumor had reached Shimba that his divorced wife had been seen lurking in the outskirts of Bly.

"She must be here," thought Shimba, his wiry hair bristling as he recalled the triumphant look in the coyote's face leering at him through the trees.

He shuffled on toward his unpainted shack, and his restless eyes were snapping, snapping as he walked. He had irons in the fire, many and hot. Would the baneful fox again interfere with his plans?

iii

The house which he approached was shedlike in its simplicity, built of pine boards, neatly shingled and with a four-paned window on each side. The earth before the door had been trampled flat, and its Spartan sterility was scarcely relieved by a row of iris plants budding along the crude foundation. At a far corner, under the house, a stone-lined cavern yawned, vomiting charcoal and burnt twigs. This was the furnace which heated the bath box within, where the Shimba family and the Matsu family, after washing their bodies with soap, were wont to take their evening soak, all in the same water, Shimba coming first and the others following in the order of their importance.

Matsu, his partner, stood with his wife and three of his children in the little space outside, and though they said nothing, Shimba knew as though he had been told what awaited him within. Their silence meant the presence of the fox woman, his former wife, who must never be referred to as different from the others of earth.

Bracing himself for the ordeal, he entered the dirt-

floored room. He stood for an instant, his eyes still blinded by sunlight. The bare-board room with its rough table and homemade benches seemed at first deserted. His eye discerned the rice bin near the wall and the jars of shoyu on the shelf—familiar objects all. It was in a far corner, where the open-fronted stove of clay and stones supported the family rice kettle, that Shimba saw her squatting on the floor.

She did not look up. Patiently, one at a time, she fed twigs to the coals so that they would glow without a blaze. Shimba's heart stood still. The fox woman, utterly disregarding her changed status, had come back to cook his meals.

“Hana-san!”

Shimba spoke hesitantly, do what he would to steady his voice. His divorced wife looked up, causing him to glance swiftly away lest the fox should master him also. Her face was white as a leper's. Gray hair straggled down her cheeks, and her eyes held the troubled look of the insane.

“Hana-ko,” he persisted, in an endearing tone, lest he annoy the fox within her, “honorably deign to return to Akagashi-san, who will transport you safely away.”

“I hear, Most Honorable,” she replied, bending toward the dirt floor.

“You have forgotten your house, Hana,” he went on, seeing that she made no move to go.

“Do I live no longer here?” she asked in the new voice which she had taken since her madness.

“I shall see that Mr. Akagashi takes you safely back to the wise woman of Ofu, who is your friend.”

“My friend—yes.”

Much to Shimba's relief, his discarded wife rose and waddled out through the open door, a shapeless creature, gray and terrible, with uncombed hair and dragging skirt.

Matsu and his family came in as soon as the bewitched

one had gone. Shimba dared not follow her. He soothed himself with the assurance that Akagashi's assistants would be kind to her and send her away as soon as she appeared in the village. Yet the episode had unnerved him and cast a cloud across the brilliant pleasures he had planned for the afternoon.

iv

On the rough board table by the window places had been laid for four; bowls for rice and tea, plates for fish, little dishes of shoyu sauce and chopsticks—the latter brown with use, not unsplit and cased with paper as they are provided in fashionable restaurants.

Matsu, who was younger and handsomer than Shimba, read the Japanese papers, while his wife attended the rice kettle. Shimba went into an inner room and prepared to shave. It was a chaos of a room, but he was accustomed to that. Since his separation from his wife Mrs. Matsu had taken to piling superfluous household goods on the sleeping platform where at night his mat was spread. An infant's gocart, a broom, a pile of Japanese magazines, a sewing machine, a bundle of soiled clothes and one of the multicolored batwing kites which the Japanese children love to fly—these and innumerable other cluttering things were strewn from platform to floor.

Shimba took a safety razor from his trunk, lathered and proceeded to shave; but the blade had scarce passed across his stubbly chin when Matsu entered smilingly. The Matuss and their four children slept in the room beyond, but Matsu's social hours were spent with Shimba. Whom, otherwise, could he talk to?

"So you are going somewhere?" he asked, viewing the unusual preparations of his successor in management.

"To Ofu," declared Shimba, meaning Sacramento.

"Ah"—Matsu came a little closer, and his eyes were wide with curiosity—"then it is a great occasion."

"And let me tell you, Matsu-san," said Shimba through his lather, "you also will shave and dress yourself ceremoniously. I have need of your superior knowledge this afternoon."

"So? And what can my poor ability do for you?"

"You must know, Matsu-san, that I have been married again."

"That I have been told," admitted Matsu. "But I have never been permitted to see the honorable photograph of your lady."

"I shall show you."

Shimba, who had finished wiping his chin, opened his trunk again and brought two photographs from its flimsy upper tray. The one he handed Matsu was done in the stereotyped manner of the cheap gallery, but the face it showed was young and wistful. The little maid in the picture looked to be about sixteen. Her mouth was small and soft as a baby's; a modest kimono was folded sweetly across her breast.

"You have done well, Mr. Shimba!" exclaimed Matsu. "And the other picture, I suppose, is of yourself?"

"Eh!" grunted Shimba, and handed over the photograph he had been holding back.

It was small wonder that Matsu puzzled a while over the hard-glazed surface which bore the imprint of the Rising Sun Photo Parlor, Sacramento. Could the perfect young Japanese in a dinner jacket and white dress tie be any kin to the hard-faced Shimba? A younger brother perhaps—the resemblance was unmistakable.

"A splendid portrait!" declared the polite Matsu.

"A little fashionable, perhaps," admitted Shimba. "But this is like the one I sent the lady. The photographer, who is a wise man, cautioned me that a bridegroom should appear especially stylish when he has never met his bride and is forced to be absent from the ceremony. Therefore he was very artistic. From a photograph I had taken in

youth he cut the head and joined it nicely to this American dress suit which he had in stock. It costs me twenty yen—very reasonable in these times. In this bargain he included a few touches to beautify my features."

"What lady could resist so beautiful a thing?" sighed Matsu. "And your honorable wife will arrive here soon?"

"In about a month," said Shimba. "The ceremony took place between our families in Kobe early in February—before the new law went into effect, you understand."

"I hope you will recognize her by this portrait," said Matsu. "Sometimes they are older than they wish to appear."

"I will recognize her," grunted the farmer.

"One would think she were coming to-day by all your preparations."

"Ah," smiled Shimba, "it is to Sacramento I am going to arrange some business and to buy bridal garments for myself. It may be long before we have another day off. So it is that I am asking you to come and give advice."

Matsu was only too quick to take the hint and to disappear into the family bedchamber beyond. Fifteen minutes later the males of the household sat at table arrayed in the best they had. Somewhat nervously they plied their chopsticks, scooping rice from bowl to mouth, dipping bits of fish in shoyu sauce, drinking clear yellow tea with that sibilant noise regarded as good form among the people of the sun. Mrs. Matsu fetched and carried from stove to table, having no place at the banquet of her lord.

Shimba took occasion, when Matsu had gone to the garage for their jointly owned car, to reenter his bedroom stealthily. He closed the door behind him, went to his trunk and lifted the top tray. Out of one corner he took a paper packet and opened one end to see that the bank notes were undisturbed. Nine hundred dollars—practically all that remained to him from last year's profits after his gambling debts were paid, for Shimba's prosperity had been

handicapped by the vice of his people. This small bale of money represented a sacred pledge to him. Before a Buddhist bonze in Sacramento he had sworn that he would gamble no more.

He slipped the bills into his pocket, determined to visit Sacramento and invest his money just as he had promised Mr. Akagashi he would do.

CHAPTER VI: AN HOUR'S WEAKNESS

i

M R. MATSU drove his car with a certain brilliant technic in keeping with his handsome and adventurous personality, but the knotty little man beside him held his peace. Only his eyes were alive, winking, winking in the broad sunlight. Shimba was not a communicative man, even for a Japanese, and this morning he uttered not a word until Matsu had driven out of the orchard road and into the main street of Bly.

"Stop at Sago-san's general store," he commanded rudely.

Matsu, being used to his partner's ways, merely nodded and guided his car carefully through the teeming street. It was Saturday afternoon, and an off day on the fruit farms; therefore the yellow people had come thronging into the settlement to buy their week's supplies, to consult the pastor of the Japanese church, to admire the outrageous foreign comedy of Charlie Chaplin at the tiny motion-picture theater beyond the packing house.

The handsome new building, now nearing completion on the lot just opposite the Methodist church, had attracted a crowd. Otherwise as severe in outline as a New England meeting house, it was adorned at the roof peak with an ornamental lotos emblem which an Oriental house painter, swinging aloft from block and tackle, was touching up with a coat of gilt. A motor truck had backed up against the door and from its tailboard a troupe of gigantic Americans were hauling big crates marked with Japanese labels as well as the English address, "Oriental Buddhist Church, Bly, Cal."

"Honorable tell me, Osaki-san," said Matsu politely, stopping his car beside a little old man in a red sweater, "has the altar arrived now?"

"The honorable altar of Buddha, Matsu-san," replied the farmer, bowing and raising his straw hat. "Bought with the money so piously collected by Mrs. Shimba."

Shimba's face was stony at this compliment for his divorced wife.

"The temple will be opened with ceremonies three weeks from to-morrow," Osaki-san explained.

"And what does the Reverend Professor Awaga think about his Christian congregation now?" grinned Matsu.

"Ah"—Mr. Osaki never smiled—"what will all the Christians say when they see this remarkable shrine entirely covered with golden prayers? It cost six thousand yen in the best factory in Tokio."

Matsu looked slyly across the street toward the small, shabby Methodist church. On the doorstep a tiny man in a frock coat stood bleakly watching. The Reverend Professor Awaga had reasons for alarm.

Shimba left Matsu in the car and entered Sago's general store. The enterprising proprietor was much in evidence, but Shimba suspected that Mr. Akagashi, the druggist, would be conferring in Sago's office where he most often repaired for privacy. It was a busy afternoon at Sago's. Behind every counter yellow boys were climbing ladders from shelf to shelf to bring down favorite brands of canned clams or bamboo sprouts. There were children everywhere, playing peep-bo behind rice sacks, sucking taffy in parental arms, peering sharp eyed round every angle of the establishment. James Furioki, only son of S. Furioki, the local barber, had just purchased a kite out of Mr. Sago's large supply. It was a demoniacal kite with a ferociously painted face. It carried a fan, and across the fan were printed three bold Japanese characters.

"Mr. Akagashi is here but very busy now," reported

Sago's head clerk, emerging from the rear with a can of kerosene.

Shimba, quite undiscouraged, passed through the jumble until he arrived at the dim recess where the important druggist sat crouched over a desk, another head close to his. A modish young Japanese, whose pin-check suit, light-topped shoes and burnt-orange tie quite outshone anything else in Bly, leaned close to his side and talked rapidly in the language which, however spoken, is always beautiful.

Minejuro Akagashi, druggist, land speculator, local political boss and power in the Beneficent Society, was a skinny little man with a drooping gray mustache and red-rimmed eyes which peered with scholarly minuteness through his gold-bowed spectacles.

"Ah, how do you do, Shimba-san!"

He rose and bobbed. Shimba removed his hat and bobbed. The elegant young man, standing apart, shed benevolent smiles.

"Meet Mr. Oki, Mr. Shimba," invited the druggist in English.

"Ah, Mr. Shimba!" cried the young worldling in the same language, as he shook hands heartily.

"How are you do?" asked Shimba, struggling with his words.

"You are on the Bly tract, are you not?" inquired the elegant one.

"Yes, sair. I take job of share-it with that lady."

"Oki-san is our representative of the Beneficent Society," explained Akagashi, shifting to Japanese. "He represents us here at Bly since the departure of Mr. Nichi."

"Most honorable local secretary."

Shimba bowed again, and made a great hissing through his prominent teeth. The name of the Beneficent Society filled him with confidence, as he had cause to regard this great league, with its offices in every Japanese colony and its mysterious power to aid his people, as his natural court

of appeal. Therefore he went fumbling into an inside pocket and brought forth a soiled envelope.

"Though I am an English scholar," he explained defensively, "I am sometimes confused by their legal phrases. So I brought it to you, Akagashi-san, thinking that you would honorably deign——"

Akagashi took the document in his nervous little hands and spread it under the eyes of Mr. Oki.

"Agreement," he mumbled, hurrying over the phrases, "share and share alike—three years. Ah!"

His moving finger paused at a vital paragraph.

He pondered over this, then nodded sagely.

"That is businesslike," he concluded. "Party of the first part to supply all tools and implements, to make all necessary repairs."

He stopped again at a clause on the second page, while Mr. Oki's head dropped lower and lower toward the document.

"This, I think, is very good," he declared.

"Agreement to be null and void in case of disposal of property."

"Would this not leave me high and dry, Most Honorable?" asked the farmer.

"That is provided for also," replied his adviser, but not entirely to Shimba's satisfaction.

"Who drew up this paper?" asked Mr. Oki, losing his pretty manners for the moment.

"Some lawyer in Mr. Helmholtz's office," said Shimba.

"H'm!" Again Oki's sharp eyes analyzed the typewritten pages. "You are protected, I see, in case of sale."

Then he folded the paper, looked at the typewritten words on the cover and handed it back to Shimba.

"Very water-tight, I say so!" he pronounced in English.

"I thought, Shimba-san," said Mr. Akagashi, looking rather severely through his spectacles, "that you were in-

tending to invest your money in the National Energy Fruit and Land Company."

"I—I am on my way to buy," temporized Shimba.

"Remember this is important to us. The time will soon be over for stock companies if the state legislature has its way."

"A million dollars will fix them," interpolated Mr. Oki.

"Be not so sure. Shimba-san, how much money will you invest in stock?"

"I am rather hard up, Akagashi-san. I have nine hundred dollars."

"Been gambling again, I see." The eyes behind the glasses became hard as lacquer.

"I have promised a good bonze that I would sin no more. I am now on my way to Sacramento to buy."

"Saturday is a very poor afternoon," Mr. Akagashi reminded him sharply. "You will probably find the offices closed."

Shimba had no argument against this.

"To tell you the truth," he mumbled, "I had another errand. I have married a lady of Kobe, whom I am to meet for the first time upon her arrival next month."

Akagashi smiled his sparse smile. Obviously this pleased him, since he had strongly urged the farmer to be rid of his sterile wife and get a woman who would honor the family with children.

"Take care, Mr. Shimba," the affable Mr. Oki cautioned with a worldly wink. "The imperial government will soon be very severe about these long-distance marriages."

"I have been careful," Shimba assured him. "But thank you, Mr. Oki. My family and hers settled that affair last month before the law was made."

"You should be very happy then," declared Mr. Oki, and Shimba was flattered at his interest.

Mr. Akagashi merely grunted. He was too busy a man to bother with old-fashioned courtesies. Bowing stiffly to

signal his caller to be gone, he resumed work on the papers on his desk. Shimba lingered just an instant. He had wished to ask his superior just what had been done about the fox woman's reappearance in Bly. But Akagashi's air was forbidding. Shimba was bowing himself out of the store when he was aware that the handsome Mr. Oki was following him.

"Ah, Mr. Shimba," he was beseeching gracefully, "just one moment's advice. You spoke about buying clothes suitable to a bridegroom."

"Yes, that was my errand," admitted Shimba.

"Have you chosen a shop?" inquired the affable one casually.

"There is the Long Wisdom Cash Store in Sacramento——"

"Do not think of it, I entreat you. Mr. Semine, its proprietor, has been proven to be a very wicked man. Could I recommend an honest place?"

"Honorable deign to do so," asked Shimba, delighted at the distinguished attention.

"Here is the card," said Mr. Oki, suiting action to word. "The Bushido Department Store of Walnut Grove. There you will find all the fruits of honesty and justice. Moreover, the prices are quite reasonable."

"I was intending to see the Natural Energy Company about investment," Shimba faltered when Mr. Oki cut in.

"Remember how Honorable Akagashi told you that their offices would be closed this afternoon. Forgive my humble suggestion, however."

"You grace me with favors," declared Shimba, "and I shall go at once to Walnut Grove for my suit of clothes."

Shimba bobbed. Mr. Oki bobbed.

"I shall make a blow-in there myself this afternoon," said the latter, proud of his American slang. "And let me aid you to a square deal."

Along the levee road by the broad-bosomed river the little car whirled through the pleasant air of spring. Here the rich Sacramento, spreading into backwaters and bayous, swings sleepily round a hundred little islands, some sandy, some loamy, yet others surfaced deep with peat beds. In this latter soil—a soil that will burn at the touch of a match—big farming industries have laid out their hundreds and thousands of acres in asparagus. The farmers have named it the Grass Country, harking back to the days when the slender vegetable was called “sparrowgrass.”

This low-lying stretch of the delta is dyked like Holland. Cherry trees show their tender pink bloom; pear orchards stretch their acres of blossoming candelabra over a surface that is many feet below the level of the river. Along the muddy waters small steam craft chug and churn. Down in the willow groves on the banks people of many nationalities live in stranded house boats, and along the roads enormous orange-colored motor busses, owned and operated by Japanese, roll rapidly on their regular trips to Stockton.

Driving along the levee road one scarcely realizes the extent of Walnut Grove. One row of Chinese shops peeps over the embankment. A joss house, too, is visible, marked out from its more worldly neighbors by its gaudy red-and-yellow porch, with a fringe of brilliant green running round the edge of a barrel-shaped roof. Under the porch are flyspecked windows, through which the wanderer may peer to behold a gilded shrine standing on an oilcloth-covered table. Bold Chinese characters over the door announce this to be the Eastern Hall of Learning. Like the Chinese themselves, this place is frankly pagan, having no pretensions to Occidental ways.

Walnut Grove, as Shimba and his companion bumped noisily into town, was electric with business energy. The

"grass season" was coming on with a rush. Tons of fresh asparagus were being poured into the local packing house to be tied into inviting bundles by Chinese and Japanese labor and poured out again toward Eastern markets. Over on the islands carloads of long white spears traveled in an almost continuous stream toward the canneries.

Without penetrating the American section, distinguished by Mr. Alec Brown's bank and Mr. Alec Brown's Tudor Hotel, the men from Bly plunged recklessly down from the levee road into the narrow, crooked streets and balconied lanes of the section miscalled Chinatown—miscalled because the Chinese sit aloof, an ever-shrinking minority. Japanese restaurants, Japanese cinema theaters, Japanese dry-goods, hardware, confectionery and grocery stores, Japanese bath houses, Japanese billiard parlors line the streets in every direction.

Young blood seemed to sing in Shimba's veins as he drove into Walnut Grove. The place, somewhat toned down by police regulations in recent years, still charmed him with thoughts of sumptuous dissipation. Had he not come to buy his wedding garments, in which he would soon make himself presentable to a lady whom he knew only by photograph? Was he not to be young again? And renewed by marriage, would he not find new luck?

His gait became almost dapper as he swung through the tangled lanes in search of the well-recommended Bushido Department Store. The signs of Walnut Grove stimulated him pleasantly like banners at a fair. The Hotel-of-Two-Stories he recognized, and not far away the equally elegant Hotel-on-a-Wooden-Foundation. He had drunk *saké* at many places here and rejoiced in the days before the white man's drought. On a shingle by a little wooden door he saw the advertisement of a learned *anma* who had once pricked his skin with a medicated needle—red-hot in that particular case—to cure him of rheumatism.

There were many signs in *kana*—the popular shorthand

of Japan, by which simple brush strokes express syllables. In many cases the sign painters had attempted to spell out English words. On the window of a soft-drink shop the compounded word "ah-u-su-ku-een" could be pronounced rapidly to sound a little like "ice cream." Upon the same system "so-o-da" and "be-e-ru" could be tortured into "soda" and "beer." The more progressive establishments bore English signs, and two doors beyond the announcement "B. Honda, Shirt-Tailor," appeared the fashionable lettered board of the Bushido Department Store.

Superficially the place compared but poorly with some of the Japanese shops which Shimba had patronized in Ofu, City of Cherries, which the long-haired ones called Sacramento. But the Bushido was overpowering in its own way. A new wax dummy, feminine in sex, displayed a plaid skirt, ruffled waist and electric blue tam-o'-shanter, with the placard pinned daintily to her bosom, "We Bargain All Goods." A wide sheet of paper which had been pasted in the window was lettered in Japanese with an announcement of a hundred items which the Bushido was willing to sell at cost less than elsewhere. The advertisement gave prominence to men's clothing, cut to the latest fashion among the Rice Country's people.

A neat, rather handsome young Japanese came forward to wait on Bushido's new customers. He seemed to be an old acquaintance of Matsu's, and was introduced to Shimba as Mr. Furo.

"We came together on the same boat from Nippon," explained Matsu. "That seemed a long time ago, did it not, Furo-san?"

"An age of ages," replied Mr. Furo, and betrayed as much emotion as is allowable among a people schooled to show none. "And now shall I show you suits of clothes, Mr. Shimba, of very latest New York style?"

While Mr. Furo was spreading out specimens of blue-

jay blue, Highland plaid and tobacco brown he talked amiably on.

"Things, I hear, are looking well in the region of Bly," he volunteered.

Shimba explained that things at Bly were so-so. Never an optimist, Shimba would not permit himself to be intrigued into bright predictions. The rainfall was still several inches short of normal. Prunes seemed to be budding fairly well. Of course the strawberry bed on the Bly tract was merely a minor investment. People shouldn't raise strawberries on that land, which was not sandy like the Florin district.

"Are the white agitators troubling our people there?" asked Mr. Furo, shaking out the blue-jay coat preparatory to a try-on.

"A trifle," admitted Shimba. "The wind will always blow, you understand."

"The Beneficent Society will take care of that, I fancy," smiled the amiable clothier. "And now, Mr. Shimba, honorably deign to slip on this stylish coat."

The parley over clothing was protracted into midafternoon. Shimba fancied the suit of tobacco brown, Matsu stuck to the Highland plaid, explaining that it slightly resembled Mr. Oki's style; but Furo was a partisan of blue-jay blue from the first. The fat Hiroshima man who owned Bushido was about to bring his own weight into the conference when a selection was finally made, blue jay having won. Its price was forty dollars—reasonable, as we will all agree, in a day like ours.

When Mr. Furo was folding the purchase neatly into a pasteboard box he looked first at Shimba, then at the suit, and gave vent to something very like a sigh.

"When will you meet your wife, Shimba-san?" he asked.

"Soon," the farmer permitted himself to explain. "I am expecting word any time."

"I, too, am expecting word," said Mr. Furo, and the

mask of Asia dropped sufficiently to show a look of expectancy.

"Ah, then you, too, have been married?"

"In February," he smiled, and his expression seemed to warm the whole establishment. "I am impatient for her to come, you may believe."

"So?"

Both Shimba and Matsu set their faces against this last remark. The man had almost confessed fondness for his wife—a serious breach of manly deportment among the Japanese.

"Then you have in reality met the lady?" Matsu relented to ask.

He himself had taken a picture bride and never regretted the bargain.

"I have known her for a long time," persisted the shameless Furo. "We played together as children—no need for photographs to identify us, you see!"

His beaming smile found no reflection in the faces before him. Matsu shuffled toward the door, as one intent upon avoiding an unseemly sight. Shimba reached for his bundle and clasped it under his arm.

"We can send it to Bly for you, if you wish, Shimbasan," declared the unmanly one, but the farmer was already moving toward the door.

What degenerate days were these! thought Shimba. Furo must be mad. How else could he be shouting in public to tell all the world that he was in love with the woman he had married?

iii

The men from Bly went forth into the streets of Chinatown. Walnut Grove's atmosphere of dissipation again affected Shimba with a mild madness. This town, and the more open gambling section of Lockport beyond, had levied more than once upon Shimba's resources. Matsu, always

a better business man than Shimba, also loved his game, but he played it with caution, as he did all things.

They strolled into the local pool parlor and found the tables already busy with the game which, in America, seems to have become the Japanese national sport. They found many friends in the room and were sitting enviously among the onlookers, when Mr. Tanosuké appeared. He was as short as any man can be without being classed among dwarfs. But Tanosuké wore his brown derby at an angle popular at the race track, and there was a horseshoe of imitation diamonds in his necktie. No one in Walnut Grove looked over his hard, square head, for Mr. Tanosuké represented sophistication and contact with the world of sport.

It came as a crushing compliment then when Mr. Tanosuké waddled across to where Shimba and Matsu sat, and after greeting them in the voice of a friend suggested a game of Kelly pool.

Tanosuké's invitations were commands. Almost without requesting the favor he got himself a table ahead of the entire roomful. Shimba sought to conceal his pride as he chalked his cue and attempted the first shot with the eyes of all the room upon him. He waxed skillful with very little practice; indeed, from the very beginning he seemed destined to pocket the lucky ball.

"What a day for you, Shimba-san!" the great little man congratulated him as again the farmer shot at random and brought down the desired number.

Shimba glowed. He never failed to expand in the atmosphere of chance, and it had been a long time since his last visit to Walnut Grove. The game lasted until well after sunset. When the shadows of evening were cast over the levee and lights began to twinkle in the pool room Shimba was a dollar and eighty cents ahead of the game. Mr. Tanosuké pocketed his losses with the ease of a man who can win or lose and take it as a matter of course.

Emboldened by his success, Shimba had the temerity to suggest that the great and worldly Mr. Tanosuké should dine with him at the restaurant round the corner. The great one was pleased, but exercised the prerogative of greatness when he insisted that he be host.

Therefore they were inclosed together, the three of them, in a little room of the establishment whose drum-shaped white lantern bore the familiar rice sign. In the full light of the place the two farmers gazed bashfully at the striped silk collar and American manners of Mr. Tanosuké. He had a square face, a perfectly bald head and diamond rings on his smooth brown fingers. A dish-faced maiden, the skin of her soft, plump arms showing through her shoddy lace shirt waist, placed a tray before each of Tanosuké's guests and set thereon saucers of sliced raw fish, daintily cooked seaweed, thin soup which swam with vegetables cut in flower patterns, shoyu sauce, egg noodles and geometric squares of bean curd. But what next appeared caused Shimba's eyes to glitter with a sportive light. Beside each plate the dish-faced maiden had set a little cup, and into each she was pouring warmish yellow liquid from a long-nosed teapot.

Saké! Mr. Tanosuké grinned, and, lifting his cup, pronounced in English what so many American drunkards have said before, "To Amendment Eighteen, gentlemen!"

With innumerable bowings and bobbings his guests drained their little cups. The warm rice wine brought quick visions to Shimba's mind. A fat share of stock in the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company, then another three years' saving, and he, too, would drink saké every night and give fine dinners to his friends. Soon he would have a young wife and many children—mostly sons.

Mr. Tanosuké had no sooner pulled his chopsticks from their paper envelope, split them apart and arranged them pincers fashion between the thumb and fingers of his right hand, than he reverted to Shimba's darling weakness.

"Some are born with a lucky day," he said. "For me it is Wednesday. For you apparently it is Saturday. See how you made all the numbers at the Kelly game!"

"Three times," responded Shimba, saké having filled his cup again—"three times I held the Number Three marble and won by it."

"For me the lucky number is two and two multiplied—provided I play on Wednesday. Here's to your luck, Shimba-san!"

"I have promised to gamble no more," declared Shimba.

"It is a bad habit," agreed Mr. Tanosuké with a serious face. "It is a vice which I never encourage in my friends, and yet I have lost nothing by it."

He raised a bediamonded hand up to his square jaw, a silent gesture indicating prosperity.

From somewhere in the distance there floated in a thin, teasing note. Some little reed instrument at the mouth of a Chinese musician was sending forth that tantalizing call. A gong sounded—bang, bang, bang! And then the elusive, silver thread of melody floated above the low-lying streets.

"Mr. Fong Duck, a Chinese, conducts a great business here," declared Mr. Tanosuké, sipping daintily at his saké cup.

"They are dogs, these Chinese," responded Shimba.

"There is a choice, even among dogs," said Tanosuké. "There is a saying, 'Feed a dog three days and he will remember you three years.' And this Fong Duck is less to be avoided than other Chinese. It is said to be a privilege to enter his establishment."

Mr. Tanosuké shot his striped silk cuffs and sat up straight, presenting a picture of majesty in miniature.

"Any one can play at Lockport without fear of arrest," suggested Matsu.

"Ah, yes, but the Chinese there would steal the mat from your floor. Mr. Fong Duck runs a club for gentlemen."

Again the thin note of music, poppy laden, suggestive, sinister, floated into the small, hot room.

At the hour of ten Mr. Tanosuké and his guests walked cautiously down a darkened street under balconies from which dim lanterns swung. Shimba's worldly guide was so short of stature that it was no trouble at all to look over the top of his brown derby. But Tanosuké was a man of will, and he took the party in hand without more ado.

Distantly glared an electric-lighted front, with an entrance set like an open box facing the street. As they neared the spot Shimba could see on its white panels many bold Chinese characters which announced that here was installed the Brotherhood Mutual Recreation Club. High in a small door at one side appeared a grated window.

An elderly Chinese slouched against one of the posts. His feet were crossed, his look was far away as he puffed daintily at his long-stemmed tobacco pipe. Anybody but an Eastern tourist would have recognized him as a lookout and have known that behind his padded back there was an electric button and that the hand he held so gracefully concealed rested upon that button, acute to warn of approaching danger—to wit, the sheriff—at a fractional second's notice.

Mr. Tanosuké, leading his party, approached the languid loiterer.

"You sabe me?" he asked in pidgin.

"I sabe you," responded the lookout with an unfriendly glare as he gazed down upon Mr. Tanosuké. "I no sabe those two man come by you."

"My friend, you sabe. They like come see Fong Duck."

The lookout eyed them narrowly for an instant, then turned stolidly and tapped his long nails upon the grated window. A panel slid back and a face appeared behind the bars. There were two short words in singsong, then the door was opened narrowly from behind. Tanosuké and his friends slid in through the crack.

In the smoke-laden room upstairs several tables were clattering busily. A consumptive Chinaman, his cheeks sunken, his eyes staring from his head, was throwing chuck-a-luck. A fat Chinaman presided at a roulette wheel. A group in the corner was playing faro. A yellow lad of eighteen sat cross-legged on a long bench, bare ankles showing above boat-shaped shoes as he dealt out Chinese dominoes. The fan-tan table at another end of the room was the busiest of all. The men in the room were mostly Japanese, though there were a few Chinamen and several black-bearded, black-turbaned Sikhs gazing on the games with their mysterious eyes.

Poor Shimba, as though drawn by invisible cords, was already roving toward the fan-tan table.

"Remember how you swore to keep away," his partner cautioned him. But Matsu himself was a little affected by saké and the heady atmosphere.

"After all, would it not be well to look on?" asked the little fellow who had brought them there. "Gambling is a curse to those whose hands have lost their grip."

"A fool mourns over a lost sen," grunted Shimba.

"You have said a wise thing," agreed Mr. Tanosuké, tossing a silver dollar on the fan-tan table. "I would try just once. Nothing reckless. Saturday, you remember, and the lucky three!"

Shimba edged close to the table and leaned over the black oilcloth with the Chinese numerals one, two, three and four marked in gold at the sides. The dealer, confronted by a pile of buttons he had just spilled from the cup, was counting them off with his wand; four at a time they fell clattering into the box. He was a bald Chinaman with a green shade over his eyes, and his wand brushed away the buttons with the skill of a magician. The black slant eyes round the table were focused, immovable as stone, on the play as the buttons fell away from the pile.

The wand gave its final fateful sweep. Two buttons lay before the dealer.

“Numba Two win!” he singsonged in pidgin as he swept away the silver and currency from the three unlucky numbers and proceeded to pay the winner two to one.

“Place yo’ bets, gel’men!” he challenged again as his cup went into the box for another load of buttons.

Shimba’s work-worn hand stole slyly into his inner pocket, where he could feel the bale of paper money which he had not disturbed, even for his extravagances at the Bushido. Blindly his fingers clasped the first rough edge they came against. As he extracted his hand from his pocket a hundred-dollar note came with it. He thought for an instant of making change, but the madness was on him. He placed the bill on Number Three, while many pairs of sharp black eyes snapped round to catch sight of this sporting millionaire.

Again the wand went clicking buttons off into the box. The stuffy room, smelling vilely of ancient China, became a well of silence. Four, four, four—the mound of white buttons diminished to a tiny scattering. Again the wand fell. Three buttons lay before the dealer!

“Numba Thlee win!” singsonged the magician.

Scarcely taking the trouble to look up, he counted out two hundred-dollar bills and handed them across to Shimba.

“Place yo’ bets, gel’men!” he singsonged.

Shimba laid three hundred-dollar bills on Number Three. Again the wand went clicking among the buttons.

For some two hours Shimba stood in a golden trance. Luck had turned against him in midstream. Once he had been on the verge of breaking the bank—which stands at a thousand dollars—but the ancient gods of China had en-

tered in to do battle with the upstarts of Nippon. His fortune blew up in an untidy crumple of hundred-dollar bills. He had doubled his losses once too often. Number Four won again. Then, remorse and hatred bitter in his heart, he had gone into his shabby pocket for his last hundred-dollar bill, when the expected happened in Chinatown.

Into the tensely silent atmosphere a bell thrilled twice—a horrid sound. The sheriff warning from the lookout below! Then it was that the most backward of nations demonstrated efficiency. Working with the speed of fire laddies, the Chinese crew flew to their places. The roulette wheel was kicked behind a panel in the wall, the fan-tan cloth was jerked away with all its freight of wealth. Into a trap door in the rear a corps of Chinese gamblers, bearing the guilty evidence, stole away with the rapidity of serpents. With equal speed a dozen of their confederates took places round a table and assumed theatrical poses expressive of innocence as they settled themselves to a friendly game of dominoes. The stage was set for the sheriff.

In the midst of alarms Shimba found himself being pulled through a rear window by his capable partner, Matsu. Little Mr. Tanosuké had disappeared—down a drain pipe possibly. For the visitor from Bly there was a drop in the darkness. It wasn't far, and poor Shimba, then in a suicidal mood, cared nothing for life or limb.

At last, limping and unnerved, the refugees reached their little car as it lurked in the shadow of a dike.

"Carry me away from this village of demons!" snarled Shimba.

Matsu at the wheel was doing his best, but the worn self-starter, against which his heel was pressed, gave forth an empty grinding noise, proclaiming a mechanical breakdown. Round the corner the sheriff's deep voice could be heard in tones of command. Footsteps sounded stealthily

along the dirt-surfaced street just behind them. Shimba sat palsied.

Out of the shadōws a dwarfish figure appeared. With a frightened grunt Shimba threw open a side door and was about to scramble away into darkness and security when something about the haunting form arrested his flight. He looked again, and recognized the sportively cut clothes, the flashing gems, the brown derby. It was Mr. Tanosuké.

"Ah, Mr. Shimba!" the apparition exclaimed, bowing low. "And Mr. Matsu! You have escaped safely, I see. How sinful I have been to lead you into misfortune!"

"I speak but the truth, Tanosuké-san," replied Shimba, throwing himself upon the mercy of the kindly adviser from Bly. "This Fong Duck is a very grasping man. Had I given him time he would have taken my shirt also."

"Ah, how I feel it on my conscience that I did not rescue you from such a thief!" groaned Mr. Tanosuké, looking warily along the dimly lighted street. "But come! The abominable sheriff is still nosing about like an enchanted badger. Tell me, Shimba-san, did you not leave a bundle at the Sons of Yamato restaurant?"

"To be sure I did," replied the financial ruin in gloomy tones as he recalled his wedding clothes, abandoned in his lust for gambling.

"Suppose we adjourn to that place. It might seem more respectable. Also, we might find saké there, and a chance to observe peace until this abominable sheriff is out of town."

Round the corner to the Sons of Yamato they stole like specters, Shimba scurrying in the rear as though all the foxes out of hell were at his heels. Up the creaky stairs they tiptoed, and into the small room where saké and conversation had already done evil work for Shimba.

Mr. Tanosuké closed the door silently; then he opened his silver cigar case and passed out black perfectos.

"Shimba-san," he began, settling himself comfortably by

the table, "this evening weighs very heavily on my conscience. How could I have let you stray into such temptation? But alas! An *oni* seems to hold him who gambles."

"I have lost everything," grunted Shimba.

"Yes, and what will the directors of the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company say to you?"

"Then you too have heard how I was to invest my money?" asked Shimba thickly.

The newly moral Tanosuké nodded.

"You have promised a holy bonze that you would gamble no more. And you have given your word to Mr. Akagashi, of the drug store, that the money should be invested. What will you do, Shimba-san?"

The farmer sat, his bullet head bowed over the table.

"Allow my humbleness to befriend you," implored the kind-voiced gentleman. "I could not see you disgraced before men for this idle evening's folly. Let me find a way out for you. Would you feel more secure, Shimba-san, if I should arrange you a loan?"

"A loan!"

Shimba raised his head.

"Quite a substantial one. The amount of your loss would be a detail—any amount more than that. Interest? Interest would be forgotten if I spoke the word! I hate to see one about to begin a new family so out of luck—and by a fault which I could almost call my own."

"What would this loan be?" asked the friendly Matsu, speaking for his dumb partner.

"You, too, might benefit by this, Matsu-san," suggested Mr. Tanosuké, his look of benevolence growing. "Such a loan you might be able to pay off by service. No cash required. My business brings me close to many matters of finance. Have you time to listen?"

Matsu leaned far over the table to catch every word from Tanosuké's wizard lips. Shimba sat like one dazed while the representative of worldly wisdom outlined his plan.

CHAPTER VII: THE OTISUKIS

i

WHEN Baron Tazumi promised to introduce to Anna Bly his friends in San Francisco he made no vain promise, as was quickly proved when her party had set foot in So Ko, the Mulberry Port, which the long-haired ones call San Francisco. Mr. and Mrs. Henry Otisuki called at her hotel an hour after she had registered. She went down to the reception room to meet them, and found there a benevolent, elderly, bulky Japanese in a ceremonious cutaway coat. He had a frank and hearty manner and the brusqueness of a successful American business man.

It was not until he had introduced Mrs. Otisuki that Anna realized the importance of her visitors. Mr. Otisuki, she recollects in a flash, was no less a person than the brilliant land speculator who had controlled the California bean market for several seasons and was rated as one of the wealthiest Orientals in the New World; less successful than Mr. George Shima, perhaps, but undeniably a grandee of importance.

Mrs. Otisuki, short, plump and pretty, with the beautiful complexion which the ladies of her race often possess, wore enormous pearls in her ears, and over her shoulders a smartly cut coat of mole. She bobbed and smiled daintily, showing perfect teeth, at every word that was said. But to the conversation she contributed nothing, preferring apparently to sit in the background and surrender the floor to her rightful lord.

Tazumi was a good fellow, declared Mr. Otisuki in his brusque and hearty way—something of an altruist, but a

good fellow. He had sent word that Mrs. Bly was to see a little of the California Japanese just to show her that they didn't wear kimonos in the street and sing snatches from "The Mikado," as most Easterners supposed. Wouldn't Mrs. Bly come out to Piedmont and take potluck with them? After a trip across the continent she must be hungry for a bite of home cooking.

"Oh, yes, do come!" squeaked Mrs. Otisuki in the voice of a child who has rehearsed her small part in a play.

"And won't Miss Brand come too?" urged Otisuki. "Our daughters are mighty anxious to meet you both after such grand send-off Tazumi sent in advance. We don't put on some dog round our place. Just come plain clothes —better prepare to stay for night. Or we like to put you up at our place as long as you in this section."

His hospitality was truly overwhelming. Mr. Otisuki was quite evidently the social head of the house. He had but to suggest and there issued from the cherry lips of Mrs. Otisuki assentive staccato chirpings.

Almost without hesitation Anna accepted the invitation both for herself and Zudie. Indeed, she was touched by this yet another instance of Tazumi's thoughtfulness. Four o'clock found Anna and her sister seating themselves in the comfort of the Otisukis' velvet-cushioned car, while its hospitable owners made place for them and the big machine headed smoothly down Market Street toward the Ferry Depot.

Among the sweet green hills of Piedmont they came at last upon a handsome house of pink stucco, built Spanish style, with elaborate wrought-iron balconies and splendid grille work at the entrance door. This was the place where they were to take potluck—no style—as Mr. Otisuki had so jauntily put it. A Japanese footman in American dress

clothes bowed them into the handsome entrance hall. Somewhere, not far distant, a rich-toned piano was sounding in skillful runs and an illusive strain tantalized Anna's memory. The Scheherazade suite! Glancing curiously into the music room beyond, Anna beheld the pianist, a young Japanese girl, her shoulders swaying above the keyboard, her eyes bent studiously upon the music rack.

A Swedish maid, fastidiously uniformed, showed them to their rooms—nicely paneled apartments with French engravings on the walls. At half past seven the ladies, who had changed to simple dinner frocks, came down to be introduced to the rest of Mr. Otisuki's happy family. The eldest daughter had been recently married to a Mr. Honda, a middle-aged banker, whose swollen, brownish face suggested innumerable bee stings. Miss Genevieve Otisuki was nineteen, slender and delicate of figure, and she wore her clothes with the air of a Parisienne.

There were cocktails before dinner, and when the party sat down in the dignified tapestried dining-room Anna had a feeling of disappointment at the sight of handsome crystal and gold plate. She had so hoped for a taste of Japanese food as it might be served by a yellow grandee of California.

"Oh, no, none of that nonsense here!" chuckled Mr. Otisuki when she voiced the suggestion. "Raw fish and noodles—back to the Middle Ages! If I should been able to eat food better than rice when I was boy I might have grown to be quite tall. Just look at Oki over there."

Anna glanced toward a very fashionable young man who was at that moment making himself agreeable to Zudie. When she had been introduced to him he had snapped out a large business card plainly printed with the words, "S. Oki, representing Beneficent Society, Bly, California."

"They caught him early and made an American out of him. Look at his legs!"

Cheerfully would Anna have done so had not the inter-

esting members been hidden under Mr. Otisuki's lace table-cloth.

"Straight as a string!" went on her host. "No squatting on mats for him! He was raised up on beefsteak and baseball."

"Don't you admire Japan?" asked Anna, truly surprised by this unexpected point of view.

"Japan? What do I know about it? I been American for thirty-five years. Of course you read much tommyrot about citizenship. What difference does that make? Don't I own land here and run two or three banks and deal in the stock exchange? Don't I have children to vote for me? Don't I send my eldest boy to Sheffield Scientific School and my youngest daughter to Berkeley? My daughter Katherine married Japanese, yes, but Honda is just American like I am."

Mr. Otisuki urged her to taste the Rhine wine which a servant had poured into her tall glass.

"Napa Valley wine," Otisuki informed her. "Can't find better in the world. But, of course, Congress has settled wine. Congress is always settling things, isn't it, Mrs. Bly?"

He made this last sally with an amiable wink as he drank heartily.

"It seems strange to me, I must confess," persisted Anna, inspired to boldness by his open manner, "that you have no curiosity to see your own country again. Its wonderful progress—I should think that would interest anybody."

"Oh, you think so?" His voice was harsher than Tazumi's, but it had the same effect of a virile bass playing against polite falsettos. "Japan! She will get along all right, I guess. She has made a jump—so has the rest of world. A hundred years ago she had no telephones. Neither did America or other places. Japan not so wonderful. Sometime it bores me to think I was born in such a place."

After dinner Anna and Zudie found themselves stranded in the drawing-room with the ladies of the party—stranded they were indeed, for Mrs. Otisuki agreed to everything with a little peeping giggle, while the other Japanese ladies did little better in the way of carrying on conversation. Anna found herself conducting a monologue, and when she paused polite silence prevailed, just as though her pleasant listeners were waiting for her to go on.

Finally she found a place next to Miss Genevieve Otisuki, who was looking over some music in a corner. Miss Genevieve furnished a refreshing contrast to her elders. She was frank and independent, with all the slang and bravado of an American college girl.

"I graduate next year," she explained, "if I don't flunk in math. I'm perfectly rotten at figures, but Dad insists on my knowing mathematics. All I care for is my music. I'm teasing Dad to send me to the Boston Conservatory, but he has a lot of old-fashioned notions about my getting married and all that sort of thing."

"I was independent, too, when I was your age," smiled Anna.

"I'm going to marry just whom I please or be an old maid," declared the freedom-loving Miss Otisuki. Then with a look of peculiar intentness: "And it won't be a Japanese either."

Anna sat wordless and embarrassed before this candid statement from one of a race which she had always regarded as secretive and reserved.

"What's the use of my being different?" she went on. "I don't care anything about the Japanese. I'm an American citizen."

"Don't you ever want to see Japan?" asked Anna.

"Why should I?" The dark eyes widened. "There's nothing I want there. I've almost persuaded mother to take me to Paris as soon as things are better over there. I'm crazy about Paris; aren't you?"

It was late in the evening, and Miss Genevieve was performing brilliantly at the piano when the gentlemen rejoined their group. Soon after Mr. Otisuki's guests dispersed for the night.

"I am working among my people at Bly. Small post, but quite interesting. If there is anything of interest you would like to see in San Francisco," volunteered the affable Mr. Oki, standing straight and trim on his superior legs as he shook hands with Anna and her sister, "please depend upon me. Or may I have the pleasure of calling at your hotel with my car?"

His thoughtfulness was delightful, and Anna told him so as she bade him good night.

iii

During their five days' stay in the Mulberry Port, which the long-haired ones call San Francisco, the Brand sisters were feted to a point where they began to feel more like visiting royalty than humble farmers about to plunge into an unknown frontier. The affable Mr. Oki, who was no giant in spite of his superior legs, proved true to his promise. He appeared with an overcoat and a runabout of equally sportive pattern and invited Mrs. Bly and Miss Brand for a spin round the Presidio drives.

He spoke English very well and American slang even better. As the pine-clad fortifications reeled by them and they threaded a perfect road above the Golden Gate their pleasant guide seemed inclined to indulge in jokes at the expense of the Otisuki family.

"Strange bird, don't you think?" he chuckled. "Always running down Japan—quite a fad with Otisuki."

"He must be a man of great ability," said Anna.

"Very live wire," agreed S. Oki. "He does quite well, considering the slum of Nagasaki where he came up from. Otisuki, you understand, is a *narikin*."

"A what?" inquired the Brand sisters in one breath.
"Excuse the vulgar Japanese word," apologized Mr. Oki.
"That word is our slang. It has been invented since this Great War, and it means—what? Let me try to interpret. It means something like a parvenu—get rich rapidly—profiteer. That and several more things. It means anxiety to spend and jump into a better class."

"And Mr. Otisuki is all that?" laughed Zudie.

"Oh, yes! But a good fellow."

Mr. Oki changed the subject to Bly. He had work there, he explained, looking after the mutual interests of the Americans and the Japanese.

"And I hope I shall have a chance to be of service," he volunteered when the drive was over and he was helping them out at the door of their hotel.

On Wednesday night they were invited to dine at the Japanese consulate, where, as it turned out, several members of the American expedition about to visit Nippon as guests of the Mikado were being entertained. Senator Jas-comb, the Reverend Doctor Greet and the world-celebrated financier, Ignatius Kohl, sat at the consul general's long table, already glowing with enthusiasm for the island kingdom they were about to see.

The table had been set Japanese fashion, with many dishes on square, black-lacquered trays before each chair. Upon the central saucer of each tray a fairyland garden flourished. Radishes cut to resemble peonies were stuck on the twigs of a lupine stalk which had been planted in a mound of edible seaweed. At the foot of this tiny island pinkish slices of raw fish were arranged to imitate ocean waves. The soup, too, was esthetic, glistening like an amber pool with lily pads and sea anemones floating in its depths.

"They make everything beautiful," said the Reverend Doctor Greet, his face bent toward his artistic food, "and I am looking forward to my visit among the people of a

great race who have learned so much better from us than we have learned from them."

Mr. Kohl, the financier, was much heartier in his expressions than he had been after the banquet in New York. He raised his glass to toast the Mikado and to swear that a better understanding between the two great nations would still forever the senseless clamor now being raised along the Pacific Coast. Senator Jascomb's warm applause, as well as his agreement with Marquis Ishii on the subject of the Monroe Doctrine in the Far East, showed well enough where his sympathies were drifting.

Anna went home that night filled with a comfortable feeling that the strong men of America and Japan were standing behind the unthinking herd, directing them wisely out of the shoals of passion and into the serene waters of a permanent peace.

iv

They planned to stay in San Francisco until Monday. It was Saturday morning, and Anna was on the most commonplace of errands when she gained another glimpse of the Orient in America; and it was a picture which fixed itself in her memory during her subsequent adventures with transplanted Asia.

The *Chronicle* had advertised a sale of children's underwear in a Market Street department store; and Anna, remembering that she was the thrifty mother of growing children, went. Once inside, she loitered, as even the most sensible woman will, among the labyrinthine counters and their display of silks, stockings, gloves, ribbons and silver-ware. Without the slightest intention of buying, she lingered over a pile of shirt waists, when her eye was attracted by a quaint picture.

A little figurine of a woman sat straight and haughty on a swivel stool in front of the counter. The tips of her daintily shod toes barely touched the floor, but there was

about her none of that squattiness which so often spoils the Japanese woman to Occidental eyes. She was dressed with exquisite taste, the simple lines of her tailored suit fitting closely to her supple figure. A slender pillar of a neck, soft and smooth as the apricot, which it resembled in color, stood proudly up from a collar of fine needlework and supported a delicate little head with the most piquant, elfin face in all the world. The eyes were long and slitlike, the brows turned up at the corners like little wings, the mouth a rosebud dot of color.

Behind the tiny princess a heavy, stodgy Japanese woman with an enormous face stood immovable, never taking her eyes from her companion. Anna was fixed to the spot, so great was her curiosity. What were the relations between the fairylike being and the clumsy Japanese woman? How prettily the little fingers, slender as reeds, picked up each trifle of lace as the long eyes looked down with Asiatic languor! She could be no woman of flesh and blood. Even in her American clothes she was like some porcelain statuette of the Ming dynasty.

Long before Anna had satisfied her curiosity the Japanese woman made a motion which was surprising as it was sudden. She laid a stubby hand on one of the slender shoulders. Without a look to left or right the Ming statuette came to a standing posture. In spite of her high heels she was less than five feet tall. The ugly companion opened her purse and handed a bill to the shopgirl, and as soon as change and her bundle were presented to her she gave a sullen gesture which sent the dainty vision on her way. The burly manageress followed a few feet behind.

Anna drew a long breath as the two disappeared into the crowd.

"I never saw such a lovely Japanese before," she said to the shopgirl.

"The little one, you mean?" asked the girl. "She's no Jap. She's a Korean. And say, I think she must be dotty

in the head or something! Never takes a step without that big Jap comes tagging along, telling her where to stand or sit down. It gives me the creeps."

Anna wasted just an instant in speculation. What trade wind had blown this lovely curio into port? What did she stand for but the picture of an ancient race enslaved, in bondage forevermore to the strong brown people whom the gods had chosen to endure?

It was noon when Anna returned to her hotel. She found a telegram awaiting her in the letter box. When she opened it she read the long day letter which was to speed her upon the final stage of her journey:

"Hope you have made the trip comfortably and enjoyed San Francisco. Please don't go by train to Sacramento, as you will find the journey tiresome. My car will be waiting at your hotel Monday morning. Be so kind as to accept its services as far as your farm. Best wishes to you all.

"TAZUMI."

Before breakfast Monday morning Baron Tazumi's car was announced. Was there an end to this good man's influence or to his thoughtfulness for his friends?

CHAPTER VIII: FIRST GLIMPSES

i

BLOSSOM time in California. Whirled over smooth-surfaced roads in the handsome car which had been furnished them as by magic, the little party passed the miles and miles of cultivated acres which hardy pioneers—Yankees, Scots and Irishmen—had reclaimed from sage and chaparral less than a half century before. Gold and emerald, emerald and gold! In every neglected corner, on every railroad embankment, hillock or ravine poppies raised their golden cups, each supplicating its little share of morning sunshine. Under the bridges the heavenly carpet of green was wrought in golden diagrams by myriad millions of low-lying flowers.

Tierra del oro, the land of gold! What abundance was here for the people of the earth; what a limitless empire of plenty! Sunburned Californians paused at their harrows to watch them pass. They were tall, muscular men, whose good-natured faces reflected hearty living, prosperity and tolerance. Even the men grew larger here, reflected Anna, gazing through the baron's plate-glass window.

A covey of fat quail, the males bobbing their plume-crested heads, scurried across the road. Short-tailed meadow larks, ere their bright wings flashed toward heaven, played on silver pipes, until the air seemed all a-sparkle with notes brilliant as the sunshine.

"Who can help being happy here?" asked Zudie, and as she turned to her sister her eyes were filled with tears.

Kipps, bored with female society, had elected to sit in

front with the yellow chauffeur, who managed the car with such perfect skill that the engine's breathing never rose above a purr. Little Nan wriggled from place to place, obsessing poor Susan Skelley with a constant fear that the door might suddenly fly open and the child be dashed to an angel's career. California thus far had added nothing to the happiness of Susan Skelley.

"It's a wild man's country," she complained, her dark eyes glowing melancholy out of her meager face. "An' ef ye don't watch out the children'll be ragin' like wolves amongst the trees. An' what's that Chinee doin' dhrivin' the car-r-r?"

"He's a Japanese," Anna informed her, lowering her voice lest the man should hear.

"Japanee, is ut? Whatever his breed, there's no good in a yella face. And it's enough o' thim pig-tailed divvuls I seen this week to spoil me nose forever wit' th' smell o' josh sticks."

The storm died out in a series of rumbles, as it always did, and Susan took the rest of her journey in grim silence. Susan was no anthropologist. To her mind the races of men were divided into three compartments—Chinese, "Naygers" and Christians. And to this belief she will adhere even unto the end of her days, which, God willing, may be many.

On a winding road above the teeming river they hung like passengers in an airship. Below them gray-coated destroyers passed slowly upstream toward the government shipyard at Mare Island. The moving waters, muddy brown from the winter rains, seemed to proclaim in swelling pride the richness of the soil that had discolored them. Powerful motor trucks, going forth with lumber and steel, returning with heavy loads of crated garden produce, passed them continually on the road.

What an empire! And Anna Bly, in all her sheltered years, had never even dreamed of its existence.

They lunched at Sacramento, and were again on the road to Utopia. Flat fields now stretched toward the white Sierras, and on almost every acre little groups of squatly men and women hoed along the rows. There were usually four people to a group, two men and two women. The men wore lop-brimmed hats of coarse straw, the women were almost hid beneath sunbonnets so enormous that they seemed to fall like capes halfway down their work-bent bodies.

Sometimes these sets of four would pause and look up from their slow battle against weeds. Their faces, flat, broad and brownish yellow, were perfectly expressionless.

When Tazumi's chauffeur had turned his car into a contributary road and threaded among the farms some twenty minutes he slowed his speed and came to a halt.

"I guess maybe wrong place," he apologized, grinning and touching his cap.

Susan Skelley grunted.

"Didn't you turn at the Somerset Road?" asked Anna, after she had consulted her little guide map.

"I think maybe you ask somebody," suggested the man, and touched his cap again.

They were standing in front of a weather-beaten farmhouse. In the rear a Santa Clara windmill turned slowly in the gentle breeze and creaked as it turned. Chickens were picking among the weeds in the front yard. Four fanleaf palms stood stiff and ugly in a weedy lawn. The jig-sawed porch was a-riot with climbing flowers. As they turned into the rutted adobe drive Anna was aware of a woman singing somewhere among the outhouses.

A Valkyr of a woman with tousled blond hair and large bare arms came swinging up the path, a feed pail in her good right hand. She smiled pleasantly when she saw them, but her smile faded at sight of the man at the wheel.

"Nice day," she said, brushing back her yellow hair as she came slowly up to the running board.

"Isn't it heavenly?" agreed Anna. "We're quite strangers in this part of the world, and we seem to be lost."

"Where are you going?" was the woman's natural question.

"To a farm near Bly," answered Anna.

The woman looked at her curiously for an instant, then said: "Well, you are lost for sure. This is the Williver Road. What you want's the Somerset Road, two beyond this, off the highway."

"Thank you ever so much," said Anna, and was about to give instructions to the chauffeur when the woman's voice, raised a key, broke in.

"It does seem queer for any white folks to be going to Bly."

"Really?" Anna raised her eyebrows. "Is there any reason for not going there?"

"Maybe not." The plump, pretty face seemed to narrow to a look of hostility. "Tastes differ--even in California."

Anna opened her eyes with a new curiosity. It was race hatred which seared the woman's face.

"Just what is this prejudice against the Japanese?" she asked.

"Did you ever try living with a lot of Japs?"

"No. But I've known a great many, and I like them."

"I guess so." The woman turned her cold blue eyes toward the pump where Tazumi's chauffeur was drawing himself a glass of water. "I guess so," repeated she. "You've never been drove to distraction by the yellow pests and forced off your farm, from pillar to post."

"How in the world can Japanese force you off your farms?" asked Anna, retaining her patience. "The whites outnumber them twenty to one in this state."

"What are we going to do when they live on a handful of rice a day and work their wives and children from dawn

to dark? How's a white family going to live alongside of them?"

"You earn just as much as you did before, don't you?" was Anna's handy argument.

"Huh!"

The woman's eyes were blazing as she turned and beckoned to an old man who came shuffling down the drive behind a span of work horses.

"Pa!" she shrilled, and as soon as the old man had abandoned the reins and come within talking distance, "Maybe he can tell you why." Then turning to the old man: "Pa, these ladies want to know what you think of the Japs."

"Japs!" creaked the farmer, removing a short pipe from his crooked mouth as he scowled up at the strangers. "They're buyin' us on the one hand and sellin' us on the other, that's what!"

"But why should you let them buy you out?"

"Why should we let the blight git into our trees?" he drawled vindictively. "Lousy pests, they jest come! And see them land speculators—callin' 'emselves white! Look at me, lady! For twenty years I farmed a nice strip down by the delta—sparrow-grass down by the river and fruit above. What happens there? So-called white man comes along, refuses to renew my lease on the good ground, sends me up to the skinny orchards if I want to rent—otherwise I git out. So out I got, and here I am."

"Why did the owner prefer to lease to Japanese?" asked Anna.

"Why?" He took off his hat and scratched his head. "He was a business man, I guess. I couldn't afford to put up the price them yeller devils did."

"Can they make more out of the land than you can?"

"When your wife's a work horse you can do a lot," was his unsatisfactory answer. "Dawn to dark, dark to dawn, them's the Jap working hours. The American's an eight-

hour man, the Jap's a sixteen-hour man. An' we don't want 'em! An' we won't have 'em!"

Anna read into these remarks a certain influence of the state legislature so conveniently at hand.

"If you didn't like your farm on the delta," she suggested, "weren't there other places to farm?"

"Lots of 'em," he agreed with a bitter smile. His daughter, too, laughed aloud. "There's this hole, for instance. I didn't have no trouble leasin' here. Because why? Because the Japs was done with it, that's why! They leased it for three years, skinned the soil, watered it white with intensive irrigation, got rich and moved on. 'Much obliged,' says they, 'and now one of you white devils is welcome to what's left.'"

He winked significantly with his rheumy left eye and spatted his pipe against his palm. Anna glanced across his orchards. The place, no doubt, looked poor and neglected. She wished she could tell him what she thought of Caucasians who would see themselves usurped from their homelands by the superior industry of another race.

Instead she asked, "Are the Japanese still leasing the property you left in the delta?"

"Leasing it? Oh, no, they own it now. Flowery Joss Stick Association got behind it in the name of a lot of little Japs born in the state. If you don't believe it, take an auto trip out there and look at the yeller devils gittin' rich off what I planted with my own hands."

"I'm sorry you have to think that way," said Anna, signaling Tazumi's chauffeur to be moving.

"I'm glad you're sorry," replied the farmer, resuming his scowl. "Rich folks can live in the Palace Hotel and run their ranches by telegraph. That's all right. But for me, I'd sweep the hull nest of them Japs into the Pacific, where they come from——"

"Good-by," smiled Anna. "And I'm very much obliged."

"Perfectly welcome," replied the stony lips of the Valkyr.

“And good luck to you in Bly,” added the woman’s father as he stood in the road tugging at the reins. “Git-ap, George!”

“The saddest part of it is,” said Zudie as soon as they were on the highway again, “they’re Americans, and they’re just as Bolshevik as they can get.”

iii

The sun was sinking low as they drove into the twisted streets of Bly. A multitude of yellow children, flying their gaudy kites above the packing house by the station, paused to stare at the outland people, for word had gone round that the Bly tract would have a white proprietress. In front of the barber shop Mr. S. Furioki stared, and a group of prospective customers joined him in the empty occupation. Everything in Bly stared. The garage, the restaurant, the general store, the nearly finished Buddhist temple, the motion-picture theater, contributed to the staring throng. For just an instant Anna had the uncomfortable feeling of one unshielded from a multitude of hostile eyes.

“Did you ever see such a bunch of rubbernecks?” asked Kipps from the front seat, craning his own neck that he might meet his mother’s eyes.

“Hush, dear,” she besought him.

A moment later the handsome car was rolling in through a dingy white gate and along a narrow road bordered with sweetly blossoming trees. At the end of the drive they saw the battered home which Alec’s father had built to live in. Its mansard roof, its jig-sawed veranda, its loosely hung shutters presented the forlorn appearance of a house long unoccupied. A knotty little man stood on the steps and removed his hat as the ladies descended from Tazumi’s limousine.

“How are you do?” he greeted them, bobbing up and down as he presented his toil-worn hand. “I am Mr. Shimba, your one-half sharer, and so happy you come!”

"We're so happy too!" cried Anna. "This is my sister, Miss Brand."

The capable half-sharer bobbed again.

"Mr. Oki—you know him maybe?—terrigraf me send Japanese house-cleaner boy fix your home," smiled Shimba, his puckery face conveying nothing but desire to please.

A troop of little men, working like brownies through the bare halls and stairways, were scrubbing, polishing, putting the house in order. What a friendly race it was, never resting in effort to be of service!

Much as she longed to like it, Anna's first view of her new home chilled her spirits. The paper, faded to a colorless gray, was badly cracked, even peeling in places. Some of the window panes were broken, and the old floors creaked as she walked over them. The few pieces of furniture which she had saved from the wreckage of the Brand estate had been delivered, and she was encouraged to find that Mr. Oki's obliging troupe had unpacked the beds and set them up.

"All this place needs," said Kipps, after a round of inspection, "is a he-man to fix it."

"We can hang things over the bad places in the paper," announced Zudie, with all the enthusiasm of her brave little heart.

"We'll do better than that," Anna decided. "This farm is going to be modernized, Zudie."

Full of her plans, Anna took Kipps by the hand and walked down the gentle slope to the river. Trunks and bags could wait; she must see her land. Bees were swinging heavily in the slanting sun. Blossoms, blossoms everywhere, a carnival of sweet-scented snow hung upon regiments of trees which marched in symmetrical rows into the distance on every side. What could be a lovelier road to wealth, every blossom to grow into fruit with which to buy their happiness?

The river rolled lazily below. Through the willows the

humble huts of the Japanese showed vaguely. Down by the stream a little rough wharf had been built, and Japanese children were stooping to dabble in the stream. One of them, a boy in a khaki soldier suit, ran along the bank in energetic guidance of a multicolored kite, an outlandish plaything with bat's wings and the body of a demon. The children laughed as the papery monster darted restlessly in the breeze, then with a spiteful swoop fell head down at Anna's feet.

"That's a pretty bum kite, mother," said Kipps as he picked up the wreck.

"I think it's lovely," said Anna.

She surveyed the intricate toy with its ferocious face cunningly painted in pink, red, green and black. It had all the grotesque charm of the people who adorn the slightest thing they touch. On a spreading fan across its body were daubed three bold-faced characters.

The yellow boy in khaki came shyly up the bank and held out his hand.

"What is your name, little boy?" she asked.

"John Matsu."

"Well, John Matsu, what are those words written on your kite?"

John Matsu merely grinned, showing his prominent teeth as he took the kite and backed rapidly away.

"He's a funny bird, isn't he?" giggled Kipps.

"They don't speak English very well," said Anna. "But you must be nice to them, Kipps. Their people work on our farm."

Kipps stood very close to his mother, and she saw the wistful look come into his gray eyes as they scanned the flowery hillocks and the deep-brown stream crawling sleepily past its emerald banks.

"Is this all ours, mother?" he asked at last.

"Every bit, my dear. All ours!"

And she crouched down to hold his slim body close to hers.

CHAPTER IX: JUST ONE MORE

i

THE experiment in agriculture which Zudie had so impetuously proposed one cold night in New York seemed from the very first to be crowned with the flowers of good fortune. No one, as Zudie had pointed out the first day, could be unhappy long in such a place. Wind and sun, the perfume of growing things, the day's work all contributed to cure those distempers bred of artificial life.

Kipps had got into overalls almost as soon as he had got into the farmhouse. The first morning was not over before he had been stung by a bee, fallen into the river and been stepped on by Rodger, an ancient brown horse, for which Kipps had formed an immediate attachment. Kipps was having a good time.

Anna's first problem was the house. As it stood, she knew it could never be a home for her family. With Zudie's help she planned to renovate the old farmhouse and make it at least endurable for women who had never been without the luxury of pretty things. The first day's experience taught her that she must have an automobile of her own. Therefore she bribed Matsu to drive her to Sacramento, where she was able to buy a slightly used enclosed car with seats for four. It was pretty and in very good condition. Anna, indifferent driver though she was, managed to get it home without accident.

When a painter and paper hanger sent an estimate Anna felt that her house must be a palace instead of a really modest establishment. She chose simple, unfigured paper

for the walls, but the cost of labor involved her in high finance, manage as she would. Zudie insisted upon decorating the upstairs rooms, which was very kind of Zudie, and almost broke her back. But it saved a little and permitted Anna to lavish an extra coat of paint on the outside of the house.

There were many necessary things to be bought at shocking prices, but the worst among Anna's trials were the practical suggestions of her farmer, Mr. J. Shimba, Esq.

"That pomp he give too much dry water," grinned Shimba, appearing at the door soon after her arrival. "Irrigation very bad, because that pomp will not do so."

She was conducted to a shed and invited to watch a gas-driven machine, which—according to Shimba—gave too much dry water. She knew nothing of internal-combustion engines, but she could hear the mournful noises which the old pump made when it worked. To Shimba's opinion was added that of Kipps, who declared that it needed fixing, so she sent for the pump's Stockton representative, who agreed with Kipps so heartily that Anna ordered a new and beautiful pump to be installed in place of the creaky relic.

Shimba was also active in asserting his rights as party of the second part when he led Anna to the tool house and displayed piles of broken wood and rusty iron which resembled nothing so much as a collection of wreckage gathered from some ancient battlefield. He exhibited the junk, one piece at a time, and his face was wreathed in the happy smiles which his countrymen employ when imparting bad news.

"Bursted!" was his favorite expression as he picked up split hoe handles, blunted plowshares and fragments torn from spring harrows.

In this chamber of horrors Anna gained her first lesson in the mechanics of farming, and the moral she carried away was: Good tools, good work. She took a certain

pride in the bright new implements which she bought from a Sacramento dealer, but her head swam when the bill came in. The dealer was kind and allowed her sixty days for payment.

As long as carpenters were needed to build a garage for the slightly used car it seemed only decent that another of Shimba's requests should be granted.

"Several houses bursted," he informed her, gesturing toward tumble-down barns and warehouses; so the owner of the Bly tract was convinced again.

"We're going to make this into a model farm," she told Zudie the first day when hammers were banging throughout the place—at ten dollars per day per hammer.

"Do you think we can stand the racket?" asked Zudie, referring to the dollars lavished upon those loud hammer blows.

"My dear," smiled Anna, "thirty-eight of our acres will bear nearly four tons an acre. Half of that will be ours, Zudie—at twelve cents a pound!"

"We're silk-stockings farmers after all," sighed Zudie. "Mr. Shimba, Esquire, does all the work and all the thinking for us. All we need to do is to sit round and grow fat. And isn't it glorious!"

ii

Glorious, indeed, it was. However, Anna never failed to find herself pleasantly fatigued when night came on. At the crack of dawn the Brand sisters would array themselves in knickerbockers, putties and smock frocks, anxious to look the part, and as soon as breakfast was over they would go forth into the orchards to assert their proprietorship, and in asserting learn their trade.

From Shimba's halting lips and from the more intelligible speech of Matsu they discovered many secrets of the prune industry; discovered why clover should be sown in

some orchards and not in others; why trees should be pruned and sprayed; why little scampering pests which gnaw at the roots must be caught and exterminated; learned that prunes are not picked from the tree like other fruit, but are allowed to ripen and fall to the ground; learned how the fruit is gathered and dipped into a kettle of hot lye solution to dry the skin before exposure to the sun.

In everything she saw Anna was impressed with the honest industry of the little men. Just as Zudie had said, Mr. Shimba, Esq., seemed to do all the thinking for them. Whenever there was light to see across the fertile orchards there was always a glimpse of little men and women, their backs bent in perpetual toil. Before school hours a flock of Matsu children were beside their shapeless mother, weeding in the four-acre strawberry patch over by the sandy road. Like their parents, they seemed never to sleep; seemed forever busy in their passionate devotion to the land.

The question of school had bothered Anna for a few days. Kipps had gone to a private school in New York. Generations of aristocrats had made the Brands a trifle particular, no doubt. A certain preparatory school, as well as a certain university, had been traditional in the family. With her thoughts always for Zudie and Kipps and Nan, she had schemed it all out, she believed, on the way across the continent.

Public school was, of course, the natural answer to all this; public school would be quite in keeping with the democratic motif of her adventure. On the edge of Bly there stood a fairly decent schoolhouse, an old-fashioned wooden building with a mansard roof and jig-sawed caps over the windows.

Anna took Kipps over there one day during the noon recess. Luncheon was over, and a number of Japanese children were engaged in an ancient Greek game called hop-

scotch or quarreling over possession of a patent Yankee swing. A small group of young Caucasians played marbles in their own corner.

Kipps was muttering something which sounded like "Can you beat it?" as his mother led him up to the steps where a middle-aged, brown-eyed woman sat beside her empty lunch basket, a tow-headed girl of eight snuggling against her shoulder.

"Yes, I'm the teacher," said the brown-eyed woman as she smiled down on the tear-stained face under her arm and explained. "She's Henry Ward's little girl. She doesn't get along very well with the Japanese, you know."

Just why the name of Henry Ward should be associated with race difficulties was a puzzle to Anna, but the pleasant teacher made it clear enough.

"He's the white storekeeper, you know. All the white people moving away made quite a difference in his business, and he's pretty bitter. I've told Lottie time and again not to quarrel with them."

"Are they quarrelsome?" asked Anna, for the first time feeling uncertain of her plan.

"They're really very nice," replied the teacher. "I think they're kinder than our children if you rub them the right way. Of course there's such a lot of them—fifty-one Japanese and only eleven white children. I don't suppose there's as much trouble as there is when other races come together—Irish and Italian, for instance."

"I don't see no use in their having the swing all the time!" moaned the quarrelsome Lottie.

"Hush, dear!" said the kind teacher, a plump arm round the little girl's shoulder.

Anna explained about her own children. Kipps, the teacher decided, would be old enough for the fourth grade.

"He's only eight," said Anna, stroking the unruly locks of her bad, bad boy. "He looks a little old for his age. I wonder if the fourth grade isn't rather advanced for him?"

"It might be," agreed the teacher, watching Kipps as he ran away to join the white minority by the fence. "It might be, but we have to make a special grading here. The American children have to be put a notch ahead of the Japanese."

"Really? I thought they were so bright."

"Bright? Indeed they are!" the teacher laughed. "But it's a question of English. They seem to forget it as fast as we can teach it to them. Of course they can't learn anything right if they don't understand the language. Once I thought we might teach their mothers and get results that way. But there's no use trying that. The Japanese women, poor dears, are too busy hoeing weeds and having babies to take much care of their children's education."

"Of course. It must be hard for these children to understand a language so different——"

"That's not it. But you see they're out of school at half past three, and from here they march right over to a room behind Mr. Akagashi's drug store. And there the Jap parson's wife gives them lessons in Japanese."

"I don't understand," murmured Anna.

"That's what almost everybody says after they've lived a while in Bly," smiled the teacher. "But I shouldn't wonder if the Beneficent Society could tell you why—if they would."

A bell rang. Obedient to the summons, children came swarming from their play to form a double line at the foot of the steps. Little girls from six to twelve, impish-eyed, flat-faced, docile, stood in line marking time mechanically at the teacher's command. Here and there a head of soft brown or flaxen hair marked a small daughter of the dwindling minority. On the boys' side the alignment was less orderly. A yellow lad of ten writhed from his military attitude, half turned and struck back. A red-headed brat had pinched him from behind.

The procession advanced, one-two, one-two, and soon

the minor race problem dissolved in the depths of the school.

Next day Anna found time to visit the classrooms and see her children among their schoolmates. Kipps, seated beside the kite-flying John Matsu and surrounded by little Japanese, was gazing wonderstricken about him. He had always been a comfort, and he had his father's eyes, reflected Anna, but when those eyes met hers she was surprised by the thing he did. He winked. That was most unmannerly of Kipps, she thought, but somehow she loved him all the more for it.

iii

Toward the end of the following week a little drama on the Brand farm brought Anna in direct contact with the Japanese parson's wife.

Since her first day in Bly she had been puzzled to account for the family relations existing in the bare board shanties on her property down by the river. All Japanese women looked about alike to her at that period in her education, but she had learned to identify the shapeless woman under the enormous sunbonnet as Mrs. Matsu. The children too were Matsu's, it turned out. Once she was touched by the sight of the patient creature relinquishing her hoe to still the screams of a one-year-old who sat securely strapped into a gocart under a tree. Mrs. Matsu gave it pap out of a bottle. Anna was horrified upon examining the mixture —a solution of condensed milk in lukewarm water.

She made an attempt to protest. Mrs. Matsu, who understood no English, smiled and bobbed. The handsome Mr. Matsu could not fail to understand, but he merely giggled and explained that "'Merican milkcan make children so nice."

Round the community house occupied by the Matsus and Shimba another woman came and went, flitting like a ghost. Anna at first supposed her to be Matsu's mother. She never

worked as the others did. She would appear suddenly, standing stiff as a corpse at a corner of the orchard, her white face blank, as silent and grotesque as some wicked goddess of porcelain from the temples of her fatherland.

Once Anna asked Shimba about the woman, but the solemn farmer looked with eyes impenetrable as lacquer, then diverted the conversation to the more important question of irrigation. One evening at dusk she saw two Japanese women from the village lead the strange being away. All bent and terrible, she waddled on her crooked legs.

A few mornings later Anna noticed that there was no blue sunbonnet among the broad straw hats of the men in the field. Near ten o'clock Matsu came hurriedly over, trotting as briskly as his bandy legs would carry him.

"I use terrifone, please?" he asked, all out of breath.

"Certainly," cried Anna, half guessing what it was all about.

When the man had found his number and filled the mouthpiece with rapid Japanese he turned to her with a smile:

"My wife get good baby from our house," he explained.

"How nice!" said Anna. Then feeling somewhat frightened at the situation on her farm: "What are you doing for her?"

"Oh, everything go pretty good," he smiled. "Doctor come fast from Sacramento."

Anna hurried down the path to the little brown houses by the river, where several neighborly women, waddling across the mud floor into the inner room, indicated that Mrs. Matsu was not without care at the advent of her fifth-born. Upon Anna's appearance they did not bob as they did in the presence of the lordly male, but their looks were benevolent.

In the disorder of the Matsu bedroom Anna could discern the figure of Mrs. Matsu under a cheap red comforter on the raised platform where they slept. The head, braced

against a notched block of wood, was still as a mask of wax. Dull coals burned behind the slitlike eyeholes.

A thin wail from the corner proclaimed the fifth-born. A tiny fragment of new flesh, red and puckery, it screamed inanely and pounded its tiny fists in life's instinctive protest against life. A topknot of vigorous black hair sprouted above the domelike forehead.

"You poor, sweet darling!" cried Anna, voicing woman's primal thrill at the sight of a new baby.

An old crone, who had been dressing the child in its first swaddling clothes, glanced up. Superstitious terror filled Anna's heart as she recognized the face of that strange woman who had been haunting the orchards.

"Couldn't we straighten this place up a bit?" Anna suggested after a look round the room. "It's stuffy in here. Can't you let in a little air?"

The helpful neighbors remained standing, benevolent smiles still fixed upon their faces. It was a cool day and the bare interior seemed clammy.

"Aren't you cold?" she asked the invalid who was huddled under the poor coverlid.

She put her hand on the waxlike cheek and was surprised to find the skin hot. There was nothing to be done until the doctor came, so Anna set to work clearing the cluttered room.

A perambulator, a broken section from a spring harrow, cans of bamboo sprouts, an unwashed wash, two kegs bearing Japanese labels, a headless American doll, dozens of illustrated Japanese magazines, a box of seeds, a framed photograph of Norma Talmadge and a battered, devil-faced kite—all these she carried from the sick room.

This kite had always interested her. The malign expression of its face, the crazy-quilt decorations of its body and batlike wings conveyed a grotesque charm. And what were the three bold Japanese characters painted across its breast?

Mrs. Furioki, the barber's wife, bobbed and smiled when Anna besought a translation of the mysterious motto, if motto it were.

"No—un'stand—Eengliss!" she hissed, and stared benevolently.

Anna took the canned goods into the kitchen. The sewing machine she rolled into Shimba's already overflowing apartment. The fragment of spring harrow she secreted in a shedlike niche which proved to be a bathroom, for it boasted the square wooden box, half filled with soapy water, where the members of the household took their evening soak, one at a time, in the order of their importance.

The Japanese doctor came at last, followed by the reverently bobbing Matsu. He was a bald, withered man with the face of an idol. To Anna's suggestions as to sanitary improvements he gave polite attention, and said "Eh!" several times. Otherwise he contributed nothing to the sum of her knowledge. She intercepted him on his way out and insisted upon being heard.

"But, doctor," she said, "can't we get her into a more comfortable bed? I'll take her to my house if she can be moved."

"My dear lady," he smiled, using fair English, "why you disturb her when she doing so well? Of course she should gone to hospital. But what are we to do? I continually tell my people that. But farmers' wives so busy. They have little time to go away."

"But the baby!"

"Oh, do not worry about that, madam. We Japanese are very good to our children." Then as though thanking her in behalf of his entire race: "Eut we appreciate it so much! Mrs. Matsu is ambitious woman and will be all right after a rest."

"How long a rest?" urged Anna.

"That for her to decide," replied the doctor as he hurried away toward his machine.

Anna was not entirely satisfied with this solution of the question. That afternoon she went over to the village, determined to ask help of the yellow pastor's wife.

She could hear the singsong of many childish voices as she entered the bleak, improvised schoolroom back of Akagashi's new drug store. Glancing through the open door she could see a charming little woman who stood straighter and slimmer than her sisters of the field as she held in one hand a textbook, in the other a pencil. From her book she would read a short sentence in Japanese, while fifty pairs of eyes would be focused on her in elfin attention. Then fifty little voices would take up her words, repeating them over and over. Fifty black heads would bob down toward the desks until fifty broad noses were less than two inches above the paper pads upon which the lesson was being jotted.

The parson's wife looked round and saw Anna. She smiled pleasantly, came down from her rostrum and said: "How you do? Won't you come in?"

"I'm Mrs. Bly," said Anna, giving her hand.

"And I am Mrs. Awaga," said the little teacher. "We enjoy writing lesson now. It is Friday, and some children will be speaking pieces right away. Would you care listen?"

Anna accepted a chair by the rostrum and sat quietly watching the process of uneducating little foreigners in English. Among the children, bending so laboriously and squinting in their efforts to form the characters which Japan borrowed from China so many ages ago, she recognized many whom she had seen in the American schoolroom beside her son. They were quaint dolls, most of them, the girls with their wiry black hair cut severely straight across the forehead, the boys with their heads close-cropped like German soldiers.

Anna picked up a little textbook and went idly through its inscrutable pages. There were quaint pictures of mythological personages. She was curious to know the meaning of those queerly shaped characters running from top to bottom of every page. But the teacher was rapping for order, and after a few liquid syllables had been spoken from the rostrum a very tiny girl with a blue ribbon in her hair took the stage and began to bubble Japanese. She swayed her body and cocked one eye toward the ceiling, as most children do when reciting.

"The story of George Washington's hatchet," interpreted the parson's wife with a deprecating smile toward Anna's chair.

A bullet-headed little yokel in overalls and a colorless sweater next took the floor to recite a long piece which he ripped out all in one breath, his eyes constantly fixed on his teacher. This was, she explained, a Sunday-school lesson which he had learned for the occasion.

As soon as the ordeal had closed and the pupils—sufficiently un-Englished for the day—had gone trooping out to the air of "Shall We Gather at the River," executed by Mrs. Awaga on a cabinet organ, Anna had an opportunity to speak the things that were on her mind.

Curiosity came first, however. She had picked up the illustrated primer and asked: "It's so quaint. I'd like awfully to know what's in it."

"Just ordinary school primer," replied Mrs. Awaga, whose English was a shade better than Mr. Otisuki's, but not so good as Mr. Oki's. "Imperial government supplies schools with such primer in Japan, and Beneficent Society sent us many when they so kindly help us form this school."

Her last words caused the visitor to wonder just what had been the nature of that kindly help.

"And these are little stories for the children?"

"Yes." Mrs. Awaga smiled indulgently and explained: "What our children will like and understand. First story

in the book is legend of Amaterasu, the sun goddess. Then it tell some legends how she made the Japanese people and how Jinmu Tenno, our first emperor”—Anna imagined that her voice lowered at the last word—“how he was descended from gods and goddesses to rule Japan. These stories go along up to divinity of Meiji epoch—important things it has accomplished, you know.”

“But, Mrs. Awaga,” said Anna, “surely, if you are a Christian, you can’t believe these stories about the emperors having been born right out of heaven.”

“I do not believe them,” said the little teacher. “Gentlemen who are running Japan do not believe them also. But Mikado makes nice idol to set up and worship. Great politics can be worked by that.”

She giggled. Only a Japanese can put bitterness into that sound.

“Beneficent Society got those book for us. Beneficent Society so kindly help in everything about this school. What we shall do? Such are same stories taught children in Japan—and if we wish keep them Japanese here——”

This earnest, laborious little woman seemed far franker than her sisters, and in her broken explanation she betrayed the presence of a secret she was loath to keep.

“I wanted to talk to you about one of my farmer’s wives,” Anna said after a pause. “Mrs. Matsu—you know her, I suppose—she has a baby.”

“So soon?” The little teacher raised her fine-drawn eyebrows.

“Yes. You see, I’ve been here such a short time. I hardly know what to do in a case like this. And this woman—well, the house seems rather uncomfortable and bleak.”

“You want me do something?” asked Mrs. Awaga as though she did not understand.

“I hate to interfere,” admitted Anna. “I’ve done what

I could, but it seems dreadfully impertinent for me to be meddling."

Mrs. Awaga giggled again.

"It very hard to do something there," she said, becoming suddenly serious.

It was the first time that local dissension had been hinted to Anna. However, the welfare of Mrs. Matsu was on her mind, so she urged: "I'd very much appreciate it if you would see what you can do."

"Oh, I try what I can," agreed the little teacher, and followed Anna to the main street.

When they had reached the first turn and were passing her husband's jerry-built Methodist church Mrs. Awaga stopped and looked at the heathen rival across the way. Its Buddhist emblem was all gilded now and the new building shone bright and prosperous in the sun.

"Soon it will be dedicated," said Mrs. Awaga in a thoughtful tone. "There will be much noise—expense will be hanged. There will be a brass band. We could not make much noise in our poor church with our small Christian organ, could we?"

"But if the Japanese of Bly want a Buddhist church here—" Anna began, only to be cut off.

"Who say they want it? It has been choosed for them. Majority of Japanese here have not called for Buddha. But there stand such a fine temple, too rich with expensive altar. So it are all over this Carrifornia. No sooner Christian church rise up nice than considerable money come from somewhere to build grand Buddhist temple so that we shall be choked off."

Mrs. Awaga stood in contemplation. The look on her small face, already marked with fine wrinkles, showed something nobler than jealousy.

"That god is a rich fellow," she smiled at last, and followed Anna across the orchards.

CHAPTER X: A CRY IN THE NIGHT

i

HEAVEN must be a land where happiness may feed upon itself and create more happiness; in heaven there are no reactions against the monotony of bliss. But at Bly, as Anna soon discovered, there was no such perfect system.

She woke one morning to find herself a prey to an unaccountable depression—a depression which she had been striving to fight off these many days. Here she stood, blinking drearily upon a land bathed in sunshine, musical with the song of meadow larks. Among the climbing roses, heavy with bloom, humming birds poised as though perched on thin air, the rapid wings which supported them invisible in the sunlight.

Merry as the morning, Zudie whistled a roof-garden air as she clattered among the breakfast dishes. How gamely Anna's little sister had taken to the adventure! But it was the thought of Zudie and of her own children that lay heavy on Anna's heart.

The idea had obsessed her suddenly, weighing her down like a cope of lead: "We're alone here! We're isolated in paradise! We have nothing in common with the yellow men round us or the white men beyond. What is to become of Zudie and of my babies?"

During the weeks past she had grown aware of a situation. The white inhabitants were turning hostile faces against the owner of the Bly property. She had got the first hint of this when Kipps had come home from school with a tale of Henry Ward's quarrelsome daughter linger-

ing by the gate to yell "Jap lover!" after him. Anna had divided her trading between Ward's store and Akagashi's more prosperous establishment in the village; and on her shopping rounds she had taken occasion to question Henry Ward, who apparently had endowed his Lottie with a bad disposition.

She had found him, a tall, stooping man with a chisel face and horseshoe mustache, sitting idly in front of his badly stocked shelves. He laid down a copy of California's most incendiary illustrated newspaper. He waited on her when—as the saying goes—he got good and ready. When she had asked him as amiably as possible about Lottie he had shoved a loaf of bread rudely across the counter and drawled, "We ain't got much use for Japs round our place."

What had she done to deserve this attack? True, she had formed almost a friendship with the wife of the Japanese parson, whose pathetic struggle to keep a Christian congregation in opposition to an alluring Buddhist temple had appealed to Anna's sense of fair play. It was no fault of hers, surely, that none but Japanese worked on her farm. The machinations of the I. W. W., she was informed, had made white labor well nigh impossible. Akagashi's grocery, too, carried a better stock and dealt more generously with her than Ward's.

Another and more pressing worry disturbed her mind this sunny morning. The first crop of the year was proving a poor investment. Over by the road a four-acre strip had been laid out in strawberries. It happened to be a sandy piece, quite different from the surrounding soil. Indeed, hers was the only strawberry patch this side of the busy Japanese colony of Florin, several miles away.

A week before picking time Shimba had pointed out the poor condition of the vines—many leaves so withered that they crackled into dust between the thumb and finger. Green berries drooped on the stem and never ripened.

"Bug!" Shimba had explained, picking a tiny beetle from

among the roots. "Many like million he come. Aggyculture-school man no could un'stand him."

Berries, however, had ripened in what looked to Anna like overflowing quantities. She had enjoyed the satisfaction of beholding a troop of the familiar brownies, male and female, squatting among the rows, pushing laden trays of brilliant berries ahead of them. Strawberries were bringing more than two dollars a crate in the commission market. Some of the pickers were making as much as ten dollars a day at the prevailing rate of sixty cents a crate. Prosper their work so long as the good ripe berries held out!

But in less than a week the fruit was being rejected, rotten and disfigured, by the packing house.

"Sorry, but we've had to throw about half of 'em out," Mr. Crane, the shipper, had informed her. "We can't touch bruised berries—a mess like that would rot a carload."

"Why should my berries be bruised?" Anna had asked aghast.

Mr. Crane had shrugged his shoulders.

"Bad picking, I'll say."

Mr. Shimba, Anna's half-sharer in the enterprise, had seemed struck dumb by the ill tidings.

"Some bad man got in our patch!" he exclaimed, his face desolate. "I fire somebody too quick."

Another corps of brownies—or at least a partially revised one—had appeared in the patch next morning. But Mr. Crane continued to reject the bruised and rotting crates. The situation had driven Anna to a futile frenzy. A minor share of her year's profit was gone. Gloom sat on Shimba's sloping shoulders. He had no explanation further than, "Bad man!" Finally he had discharged his entire crew, and found nobody to take their places save the little band of faithfuls, Matsu, the convalescent Mrs. Matsu and their two oldest children.

Anna and Zudie had tried picking for a day, to limp

home, back-broken and dejected. Baron Tazumi's prophetic words, "I should hate to think of your growing bent in a year, of your pretty hands becoming red and swollen," had mocked her in her troubled dreams that night.

ii

So on this brilliant morning Anna stood by her blossoming porch and looked upon paradise with lackluster eyes. Where could she find some one of her own race and tongue to counsel her?

Down the driveway a jaunty figure of modern fashion came striding into view. It was Mr. Oki, Bly representative of the Beneficent Society. This morning he wore a suit of dark-blue serge, a tie of coral silk and a very modish derby jammed over his ears.

"Ah, Mrs. Bly," he smiled as he lifted his fashionable hat, "I see you are flourishing like the green bay tree. And how goes the farm by now?"

"I'm having rather poor luck with my strawberries," she confessed. "Possibly you could give me some advice."

"I have just been over there," he informed her. "You cannot expect full crops from such old vines. Then the strawberry bug! A very bad pest. The state agricultural school can suggest nothing to stop these insects. The more you discourage them the more they come. Something like what Mr. McClatchy says about the Japanese!"

At the last remark he twinkled and giggled merrily.

"It isn't the pest so much," Anna explained. "Half our berries have been rejected by the shippers."

"Oh!" His bushy brows went up.

"Mr. Crane says they come to him so bruised that they can't be shipped."

"Look out for that Mr. Crane," said Mr. Oki, lowering his voice. "I do not wish to disparage this gentleman. He is very honorable gentleman within his own lights. But competition, Mrs. Bly! It is a cruel thing."

"What could Mr. Crane get by spoiling my berries?" she gasped.

"It is ver-ry complicated, Mrs. Bly," declared the elegant Oki. "And, of course, it is hard for lady, however well informed, to run a farm at a profit nowadays. I wish I could give you some advice, Mrs. Bly."

"You mean you want me to sell?" she asked, foreseeing his next remark.

"Well, I would advise it. A large syndicate, backed by American business men, could do wonders with this farm. The Japanese, after all, are not progressive like Americans. We take our hats off to their enterprise. California agriculture to-day requires scientific farming on big scale—just the way Americans think of everything."

"We've come here to learn," replied Anna, "and it wouldn't be a sporting thing to sell out before we've tried."

"Ah, if you wish to experiment!" He smiled, then added: "I am not buying farms, you understand. But some enterprising American concern could do wonders with your land."

He was more than affable to Zudie when that young woman appeared, picturesque in knickerbockers and a brownish smock frock down which her honey-colored hair rilled in a pretty braid.

Fluently he discussed the topics of the local colony. The Buddhist church? Oh, yes, it would be opened with a great pow-wow next Sunday. Mr. Oki giggled as though the Light of Asia were a great joke in the town of Bly. Oki was a Christian, he was quick to explain—none of that gong-banging nonsense for him. The Beneficent Society? It had nothing whatever to do with the temple. Some of their members were Buddhists, of course, just as Americans might be either Catholic, Methodist or Mormon. But the Beneficent Society rather discouraged Buddhism. They, as an association, were inclined to prefer Christianity, a very nice religion, which made the Japanese so American!

When Mr. Oki had gone Anna had a disturbing memory of Mrs. Awaga and her tragic look across the street at the gilded pagan emblem surmounting the trim new Buddhist temple.

All the Bly family, Susan Skelley included, tried berry picking that afternoon. Kipps appeared in the patch uninvited.

"What are you doing out of school?" his mother asked.

But the boy looked at her stubbornly, rebellion written on every line of his freckled face.

"I'm through," he declared.

"Kipps, has Miss Barker sent you home?"

"No, mother." His small overalled figure stood defiantly before her. "I've sent myself home. I'm tired of being the goat in that place."

"You shouldn't talk that way to me," she reminded him gravely.

"I know it, mother," replied her bad boy.

She had no heart to discipline Kipps that afternoon. There was much to be done before nightfall. When she got herself a berry tray and tried to squat among the vines as the Japanese did she found that Kipps, taking matters in his own hands, was working beside her. It was back-breaking work. She wondered how the Japanese stood it, and she for once envied them their short legs.

Zudie, who had begun the day with a lilting song, soon paled in the sun and went limping to rest under a pepper tree. Anna tried to stick it out till sunset, but the pain in her back crept up to her head. Shimba and the industrious Matsus crept steadily on. Their short, crooked legs seemed to carry them so close to the ground that they had scarcely to bend over.

When Anna gave up to join her sister in the pepper tree's lacy shade she was both proud and angry to see that Kipps was sticking. Susan Skelley, scolding industriously, because "Nobody could blame th' child for runnin' away from

thim Chinees," continued to pick, far in the rear of the skillful yellow people whom she hated so whole-heartedly.

"What are we going to do about Kipps?" asked Anna of her weary sister.

"Just what we're doing," answered Zudie sharply with something like a moan.

iii

Every one in the Bly farmhouse went to bed early that night. Susan Skelley had tucked the little Blys into their beds. By half past nine the house was perfectly silent. Only Anna and Susan Skelley were awake. Across her pillow Zudie's light hair fell like a river of gold. Through a crack in the door down the hall Anna could see Susan Skelley, her skimpy gray hair done in a curious topknot, sitting angular as a bean pole. A pair of spectacles sat crooked on her sharp nose and her thin lips moved as she read reverentially from the pages of the *Irish World*.

Anna, seated before her mirror, studied her face and remarked that she had grown a trifle thinner. There were few wrinkles as yet, but they would come. She was very tired, yet her brain was running too busily to admit sleep. It was one of those moments when the weary body seems to loose its hold upon the soul, to permit the thousand fingers of the spirit to reach forth, feeling for impressions in the empty air.

Silence lay upon the earth, and out of the silence there seemed to come a word of doom. Anna was no neurotic, but she had grown to be afraid of that stillness, that absence of all sound which closed about her, hedging her in from all the homely, wholesome things she knew.

Hark! Somewhere from the moonlit outer world there came again that wail. Night after night she had heard it, floating thin and icy clear above her orchards; and now it came more distinctly than before, small as the cry of a child, yet long-sustained and terrible. The listening woman

felt the cold of fear creeping down her back. Shimba had told her that it might be a coyote—only a werewolf could have uttered a cry like that!

Her teeth were chattering now as she controlled herself with an effort—restrained her impulse to gather Zudie in her arms and weep aloud for comfort. Yet she stood at her bedroom door palsied with superstitious terror of the soil, sweet and commonplace by day, giving up ghosts by night.

Down the passage she could see Susan Skelley by her door crack. She had dropped the paper from her hands, and frightened eyes glared above the crooked spectacles.

“What is it?” Anna tried to say, but her mouth was too dry for speech.

She stood a long time, fixed in dread. Again silence. Finally she moved to the window and raised the blinds cautiously. A ragged moon was rising over the orchard tips, which stood still as painted twigs in the immovable air. She pulled down the blinds with hysterical haste, dreading another cry. But there were no more.

At last she turned out the light and crept into bed beside her sister. Every muscle in her tense body ached for rest, yet her eyes strained into the darkness. She scolded herself for her childish fear of the dark and of a night cry from a harmless little animal. She clung to her sister’s sleeping body and seemed to feel comfort. After all, they were together. All the faces in the world were not yellow, smiling and unfathomable.

iv

A terrific noise roused her from her sleep. Some one was pounding at the side door below. Anna bounded out of bed, slipped on a wrapper and thrust her head out of an upper window. On a square of flagstone stood the farmer, Shimba, a lantern in his hand, his big, withered face upturned in terror.

“What’s the matter, Shimba?” she managed to ask.

"You come, boss!" his heavy tones were summoning her.
"You come! Myode wife!"

Anna, unable now to speak, looked down on the fixed stare below and heard the repetition, "You come, boss!
She make herself dead."

Barefooted as she was, Anna scrambled down the stairs to follow Shimba's guiding lantern along the driveway toward the garage. The door stood wide open, and it scarcely needed the feeble light to show the horror that dangled from the rafters. The shapeless body swung like a bundle of old clothes above which a ghastly head, hair disheveled, eyes staring, fell loosely to one side.

A frozen spectator in this nightmare, Anna stood there, unable to look away, unable to scream.

"Can't you do something?" she heard her own voice asking quietly, as though from a great distance.

"She make herself dead!" Shimba kept repeating, his face as blank as a round stone.

The dangling horror swayed slightly on its noose.

"I'm asleep!" Anna told herself.

In the dim lantern light she could see the familiar objects of her new garage—the workbench, the oil cans, the reddish inner tubes hung on a peg. She laid her hand on the fender of her car and felt its varnished surface. No, she was not asleep.

And still the human bundle swung there, perfectly still, as though it had always been a part of the place. Shimba touched it and again it swayed.

"Don't!" she entreated huskily.

Then it was that Shimba added the last touch of horror.
"I cut her off!" he cried.

With the agility of a monkey he mounted a workbench and began haggling the blade of his pocketknife across the yard of cloth which suspended that dangling thing. The body fell to the floor like a wet sack.

Anna screamed aloud and ran toward the house. Lights came flooding from upstairs as she stumbled in. Over the stair rail she could see Zudie's pretty, frightened face. Then Susan Skelley came scolding down, uttering maledictions against all Chinese.

"She's hanged herself!" screamed Anna, and cried over and over again the senseless question. "Can't somebody do something?"

"You've been dreaming, dear," said Zudie, coming down to put a soft arm round the huddled shoulders.

"I haven't! It's there in the garage."

"I'll see—"

Zudie was starting toward the door.

"For God's sake, don't!"

Anna, clutched tight against her sister, was sobbing and sobbing on the stairs. Outside the excited rattle of Matsu's car hurrying toward the village could be heard.

"I'll dress myself," said Zudie as soon as her sister seemed a little calmer. "Then we'll see what we can do."

Susan Skelley leaned over to put a knotty hand on Anna's shoulder.

"Bed's the place for ye, me dear," she said in a tone of bitter kindness. "And thim yella divvils'll be the death of us all—it's the truth I'm tellin'."

But in spite of Susan's supplications Anna still huddled on the stairs, unable to move, praying inanely for deliverance from the fear.

"Ye'll ketch yer death there," Susan scolded on, and had just laid her knitted red shawl across Anna's shoulders when a deeper, heavier burr of machinery was heard coming from the orchard road. An instant later the doorbell rang.

"Ye's think 'twas iliction night be th' noise av 'em," shrilled Susan.

"I'll go," said Anna. "I'm all right now."

"Ye'll do nothing av the kind!" announced her dominant inferior.

"Susan, go get some clothes on!"

This appeal to modesty had its effect on the maiden Susan, who scurried up the stairs and permitted her mistress to answer the bell.

Anna switched on the light in the sitting room and unbolted the door. Reaction had set in. After what she had seen she could fear nothing. A tall, raw-boned man in a leather coat stood in the square of light, his florid, well-fed face beaming amiably under the brim of a greenish motor hat. His Anglo-Saxon look of health and well-being seemed to bring clean air into the poisoned atmosphere.

"Is this Mrs. Bly?" he asked, removing his cloth hat and showing a head of blond hair combed back pompadour fashion.

"Yes," she faltered, "I'm Mrs. Bly."

"I hope you'll forgive my walking in on you at this time of night," he grinned. "But I heard in Japtown that there'd been some trouble here."

"My foreman's wife has just—"

She was unable to say the rest.

"I know," he replied consolingly. "The Japs are always pulling something like that. I heard there weren't any men on the place, so I thought you might let me poke round a bit and straighten out this mess for you."

Anna gazed at him, wild eyed, again bereft of speech. How came this worldly young gentleman into the wilderness just in time to be of service? He was no farmer apparently. True, he wore putties and stout brown shoes, but he wore them with the air of an amateur mountain climber.

"My name's Leacy," he said, apparently recognizing the necessity for an introduction. "I'm a farmer, too. I run an asparagus ranch down on the delta."

"I'm so grateful to you——" she began, and stopped in time to save herself from crying.

It was good to know that an American was on the place.

CHAPTER XI: DUNC LEACY

i

THREE was little sleep in the Brand house that night. The worldly asparagus farmer, Duncan Leacy, took the ranch under his own management for the short period of disturbance. It was he who telephoned to the coroner, quieted panic in the Japanese huts, took charge of the county officials when they arrived and saw to it that the poor tragic body out in the garage should be carried away with the least possible shock to the women of the household.

Dunc Leacy seemed to know everybody and to call everybody by his first name. To him the coroner was Irv and his assistant Harry; the raw-boned farmer who drove his car he addressed as Bud, and Bud, not to be outdone, addressed him as Dunc. Alert, energetic, pleasantly commanding, Dunc converted the ghastly affair into a matter of business, and everywhere he turned he brought sanity, order and good nature into the night where terror had but now held sway.

It was well after midnight when Irv and Harry, having made a conscientious inquiry, rolled away with the broken relic of Shimba's past. As the dead wagon was departing Dunc said something to the officials which caused a laugh. This was the only jarring note which had come to Anna's ears since the asparagus farmer took charge.

The farmhouse was ablaze with light. The women, dressed as for a new day, were astir in the kitchen. Only the children, exercising the prerogative of youth, slept serenely through it all.

Anna found Mr. Leacy on the veranda busy with the collar of his leather coat.

"Oh, have they gone?" asked she faintly, the chug-chug of the death car coming distantly to her ears. "I was going to ask them in for a cup of coffee."

Leacy grinned, showing his strong square teeth.

"You needn't bother about Irv," he declared. "He's used to it. But I'm not, to tell you the honest truth. I'd certainly be grateful for the strongest drink you've got in the house."

"We should be the grateful ones," Anna declared, struggling for words with which to express her gratitude. "If it hadn't been for you I don't know what we should have done."

"Oh, pshaw!" was his manner of dismissing the subject.

"It was perfectly providential," said Anna, again taking comfort in the presence of this tall, blond man with the clear Anglo-Saxon eyes.

"I was in luck," he agreed. "I'd been to Sacramento on some law business, and I took a chance on dropping in on old Akagashi and threatening him with suit. He'd been breeding trouble in one of my packing houses. Say, talk about your lawyers! I'm a pretty good business man myself, but when a Jap draws up a legal paper he deals six jokers to the pack. Gosh, that coffee smells good!"

"Won't you ask your chauffeur in, too?" urged Anna.

Dunc Leacy laughed, and the sound was good to hear.

"Chauffeur!" he roared. "Why, Bud's my right-hand man."

He leaned over the railing and shouted into the night.

"Hey, Bud! Come on in and get a cup of coffee!"

"Sure!" was the cheerful response.

Dunc Leacy and his familiar Bud came into the kitchen and joined forces with the volunteer cooks. While Susan Skelley, her hatchet face cheerful for the first time since her arrival in California, basted eggs in bacon fat Leacy

insisted upon looting the pantry for cups and saucers.

"God helps the Irish," he explained, "and all others help themselves."

At this Susan Skelley was heard to cackle. It was a rusty sound coming from a throat unaccustomed to such weak indulgences.

"I've often looked over this way as I passed by," Leacy informed his hostess. "I had a sort of fellow feeling for the ranch. It's the only Yankee name hitched to a piece of property in this region. Nice place, too, only I've wondered why your Japs have kept on drying prunes the same way Noah dipped 'em on Mount Ararat."

"Is our prune dipper as old-fashioned as that?" asked Anna somewhat nervously.

"About. But don't take my word for it. I'm a crank on modern machinery."

When coffee was poured and eggs were served, as all good eggs should be, directly from skillet to consumer, the members of the party seated themselves round the tidy oil-cloth while their deliverers fed a hearty appetite and glowed with good digestion.

Leacy passed his cup for the third time, and as he drank he talked frankly, boyishly about himself. He had gone to war as an engineer and passed the adventurous months as a lecturer on internal-combustion engines in a Middle Western training school. During his absence his sister had taken the asparagus farm and grown corn for the Food Administration.

Forty years ago his father, trained as a lawyer, had acquired five hundred acres of island land in the delta. Chinese cheap labor was the politician's cry in those days. Labor indeed was a drug in the market in the splendid idle 80's.

"You could hire a Chinaman for forty cents a day then—just think of it!" said Dunc Leacy. "They had labor to throw away—just as they always throw away a cheap com-

modity. Why, dad used to tell me of an English engineer who thought up a bright plan to dike the river along Venice Island dirt cheap—literally dirt cheap. His plan was to saw bricks out of the peat beds, build an embankment of it and hold the water for all time to come.

“He put eleven thousand Chinamen on that job—eleven thousand Chinks at forty cents a day! They worked like beavers and built a giant dike as pretty as the Tower of Babel. It was a ninety days’ wonder. People came from every corner of the state to see this miracle of modern engineering.

“It was a grand little dike all right until spring came. Then the snow began to melt in the Sierras and started the old Sacramento climbing like a squirrel. One morning Mister Engineer woke up to find that his house was floating away and his eleven thousand Chinks were navigating on roofs and pieces of timber.

“That levee was a grand conception, but it had just one least little weeny fault. Mister Engineer had forgotten to reckon on Nature’s most stubborn law—specific gravity. Peat, you know, is lighter than water. Throw it in a ditch and it floats away like so much rotten wood. And that’s exactly what happened to the Venice Island dike when she struck high water.”

Dunc Leacy leaned back and regarded his audience, a speculative look on his sunburned, boyish face.

“But just think of it! Eleven thousand Chinks at forty cents a day! With a gang like that in these times we could build a system of safety locks across the whole mouth of the Sacramento and save the delta country from the danger we’re always afraid of in dry years—salt water backing up from the bay and spoiling the soil. Forty cents a day!”

“It sounds a little like slavery,” interjected Anna.

“Doesn’t it!” agreed Leacy, studying her with eyes as clear gray as her own. “And I sometimes wonder if that isn’t what farming is. Nature is the hardest boss in all the

world. She lashes us with storms and she punishes us with droughts. When we give up praying for rain and mortgage our souls for new irrigation systems, then Nature opens the sky on us and floods us out for miles round.

"There are those who believe that farms should be run by soviets, with workmen's and sailors' delegates to tell us when to start and when to stop—mostly stop. But you can't run a farm by blowing a whistle at nine o'clock to summon merry peasantry with dainty lunch baskets who will knock off promptly at twelve to enjoy a two hours' organ recital in the model assembly hall. It's getting almost as bad as that in a lot of places, but it won't work. Because why? Because Nature is the darnedest scab in all the world. There isn't a labor law in the calendar that can keep asparagus from growing in the early morning and late afternoon and during the night. If there's no one there to cut it and the crop spoils on our hands Nature should worry. She furnishes the germinating instinct and the life tissue to the plants. Then she passes the buck to humanity and goes her happy way."

"Well then," cut in Anna, reverting to her pet theory, "under such conditions doesn't Japanese labor save the day?"

"I never said that it did," answered Leacy with a grin.

ii

Without explaining his evasion, he turned again to the subject of himself. He had been educated as an engineer. For two years after his graduation from Cornell he had devoted his time to problems of river dredging and drainage canals. Then the news of his father's death had brought him back to the delta country and the management of a ranch which had prospered indifferently under the old-fashioned system of cheap labor.

The days of coolie labor had passed; the tide of Chinese

had turned back toward the Orient, and the Japanese, ambitious for land and sharp at a bargain, were competing with the whites on a wage scale which would have sounded ridiculous in the easy-going 80's. Young Leacy looked over the land with the eyes of an engineer and saw in it an engineering problem pure and simple.

He cast away the slow hand devices with which slavish coolies had grubbed among the asparagus ridges. He mortgaged his future for traction plows and gas-driven harrows. A little later he invented an ingenious device by which a gas-driven caterpillar can pile up the peat ridges acre after acre, where once a multitude had sweated in clumsy toil. He set up a laboratory on his ranch and studied the chemical eccentricities of peat until he found the sun-born acid that destroys crops; and that he learned to wash away by a system of drainage ditches.

All this he told with a boyish frankness which showed no trace of egotism; or if it was egotism it was of a type so pleasant as to create sympathy in his listeners.

"But, Mr. Leacy," smiled Anna, "with all your wonderful inventions you haven't been able to do away with labor entirely!"

"I wouldn't say that," he grinned, and winked over to his familiar, Bud. "I have two hundred and eighty men on my pay roll during the cutting season. That includes, of course, the packers. But the grass cutters are the aristocrats of labor on our ranch. Some of them have made as high as seventeen dollars a day."

"My word!" cried Zudie. "I would mow lawns myself for less than that."

"It's some harder than mowing lawns," grinned Leacy. "The grass cutters, you know, are the fellows who jab long spears into the ridges and cut out the green asparagus—and it's a man's job, I'll say."

"And what would you do without Japanese for that?" asked Anna triumphantly.

"That's the joke of it!" declared the farmer engineer. "The Japs are positively n. g. at grass cutting. And I'll tell you why. Do you mind my smoking?"

Upon Anna's permission he produced a leather case, presented it to Bud, selected a cigarette for himself, and after a puff talked on.

"I don't know why there has been so much bunk circulated about the Japs, unless they've circulated it themselves —they're grand little circulators, you know. Sentimental Methodist missionaries are always moaning round about the wonderful little people who are so economical that they grow three hills of beans on grandmother's grave, water it with their tears, take the plants in at night and thus produce enough grub to feed the whole darned family for a year.

"Now there's just a grain of truth in that. The Jap is a one-horse farmer; the American is a thousand-horse farmer. Our imagination takes in the whole landscape, while a Jap gets down on his haunches and rubs a dinky piece of dirt between his hands.

"The superstition has gone round that every Jap has the brain of a Harriman and the body of a toy Hercules. Bunk! The trouble with the Japs is just this: They're lacking in stamina."

"No!"

The protest came from Anna and Zudie at one breath.

"Strange, but true. The Japs can't compete with Portuguese or even Hindus at grass cutting, because they haven't got the physical strength. They're best at dainty little jobs like picking fruit or paddling round the rice plantations. If you'll ask me the real reason why Japanese wives work with their husbands in the fields, I'd tell you it's because the men aren't a minute stronger than the women."

"Stop!" begged Zudie. "You've got my head going round and round. Everybody I talk to has something different to say about the Japanese. One Californian says they're little giants: another comes along and declares that

they're positively anaemic. I'd like to know who'll tell me something reasonable about Japanese labor."

"There's no such thing as a Japanese laborer in this country," grinned the amiable Mr. Leacy.

"Well, what in the world is it that we see picking and hoeing away in all the fields?"

"A lot of calculating little business men temporarily embarrassed for capital. In a year your Jap will have saved a stake out of his skyscraping wages—provided the fan-tan dealer doesn't get it. He'll take his stake round to the Beneficent Society, and the Beneficent Society will see a Japanese banker and the Japanese banker will interview the Mikado's government; anyhow that's my personal dope on the matter. Nobody knows. The next you know your humble worker in the field will be bossing a plantation in the name of a minor child backed by some highfalutin' stock company."

"He'll have to employ more Japanese to work for him, won't he?"

"Sometimes. Often as not he'll be paying wages to Portuguese or Chinks or even Yankees."

"Well, if he's more frugal and enterprising than the Chinks and Yankees, I don't see why he shouldn't be rewarded," declared Anna stoutly.

"Neither do I," admitted Leacy with a glance at his wrist watch. "As a matter of fact there's a lot of bunk about Japanese low standards of living. What we call economy and self-control in ourselves we're too apt to call low standards in the Japanese. If a man wants to live poor and save money, it's nobody's business but his own. That was Ben Franklin's theory. But just the same, I don't see why we should go round calling the Japanese 'laborers.' Hello! Half past two! Nice hours for farmerettes to be keeping!"

The Brand sisters accompanied their guests to the edge of the veranda and said good night. Bud, the right-hand man, blushed painfully and said, "Thank you, ma'am, for

the nice time," ere he went down to the big car below and shot a searchlight's gleam through the sleeping orchards.

"I wonder if it would amuse you ladies to come over to our place on the island for a party to-morrow night?" asked Dunc Leacy with something of the embarrassment that his right-hand Bud had shown.

"Oh, what fun!" cried Zudie, always thirsty for pleasure.

"I'll tell sis—she's my boss, you know—and she'll be tickled to death. If you'll come we'll send the car over for you in the afternoon."

"How awfully nice of you!" said Anna in a voice that betrayed her indecision.

"We don't put on any dog," he assured her. "We're all members of the Overalls Club. But if you'd like to look in on us, and it suits your program, just ring us up in the morning, will you? But I forgot—it's morning already. Sorry to have kept you up so late."

The big car purred cheerily as it sped away down the drive.

"I hate to see him go!" declared Zudie, looking after the fading ruby light. "I could sit up all night listening to his asparagus romance."

"He's remarkably agreeable," agreed Anna. "And I shall never forget the nice way he did things for us to-night. But, of course, we can't go to his party."

"Oh, Ann!" cried Zudie. "For heaven's sake, don't be a prude!"

"I'll try not," replied Anna with a cooling look. "But what do we know about these Leacys?"

"He seems to know everybody," pouted her little sister. "Just see how he called the coroner by his first name!"

"I don't think I should exactly care to dance with the coroner," objected Anna.

"I'd dance with a skeleton, I'm so crazy for a party," declared the frivolous member of the family.

"I'm sorry, Zudie," said Anna, her conscience touched at

the thought that her poor destiny had robbed Zudie of her share in life.

"But then if you think the Leacys might be horrid or anything——"

This concession would have settled it had not Susan Skelley stepped in.

"Ye ought to be sinsible about somethin'," came the acrid voice behind the screen door. "Here ye are, two handsome ladies, stuck away on the idge o' creation, wit' nawthin' but prunes and Chinese whose lightest idea o' fun is to go hang 'emselves in a gar-r-rage. If ye kape away from th' gintlemen a year longer ye'll be losin' yer teeth an' yer good manners and be damned for a pair av ould maids."

"Thank you, Susan," laughed Anna, regarding the slat-like figure and the hank of faded hair under the hall light. "After that sermon we can't fail to go to the party."

CHAPTER XII: A DANCE ON THE ISLAND

i

SUNSET found them rolling pleasantly into the dike country along the smooth levee road. To Anna it was a miracle, so different was the character of landscape from that of her own farm. There was the wonder of California; hundreds of little principalities like this, each with its own marked individuality, collected into an empire under the bland spell of the Pacific.

Dunc Leacy had brought his sister with him when he called for the ladies at the Brand farmhouse. Miss Marietta Leacy was a raw-boned maiden of forty, witty and capable, as the modern spinster so often is. In her angular way she resembled Duncan; but it was obviously another case of Nature's injustice in permitting a whim of heredity to throw all the beauty of the family to the male side. Anna's Eastern-bred soul was gratified by the feeling that Miss Leacy was a lady born and sophisticated in the world of manners.

Dunc and Marietta loved each other with the rough-and-ready devotion peculiar to brother and sister.

"Do you wonder that I call her boss?" asked Dunc with a grin at Anna.

"Hyperbole pure and simple," sniffed the boss. "If ever there was a beaten and driven female in the world I'm it. Tending your furnace, cooking your meals, milking your cow, brushing your hair and reading Henry Adams to you when you're tired."

"I leave it to you," said Dunc, turning his florid face to-

ward the Brand sisters. "Isn't she talking like a suffra-
gette?"

"There he sits maligning his own flesh and blood!" de-
clared Marietta, pretending great indignation. "He's al-
ways teasing me to register and vote for some silly man or
other. And that's his revenge on me for remaining purely
feminine."

"Woman's place in the home! She's a cave woman,"
Dunc explained, and looked to see how that would affect
his sister.

"Well, if I didn't stay in *your* home," upspoke the maiden
lady, "I shouldn't care to know what it would become."

"I'll hand that to you, boss," admitted Dunc affection-
ately, and added: "I hate to spread the family reputation.
But Marietta's the best fore-and-aft, up-and-down little
housekeeper on the island, bar none and challenge all com-
ers."

They shot across the drawbridge and turned into the
Island Boulevard, which wound its way high above the
pear trees, whose candelabra were already beginning to
bend a little under the weight of pendant green pears. A
miniature colonial house, neat and perfect as a toy, stood
on a hillock. Roses climbed its trellises, geraniums flamed
at its base, and down the gentle slope a carpet of ice plant
lay radiant with pinkish bloom.

"We all live the cafeteria life out here," explained Miss
Leacy as she unlocked the front door and let them into a
pretty redwood-paneled room. "We have no servant prob-
lems for the simple reason that we have no servants.
Dunc, it's cold as a barn in here. Run out and bring in
some wood."

"You see," he said, turning toward his guests as if for
corroboration.

"You're going to let us help, aren't you?" suggested
Anna.

"Oh, will you? We've got to make a million sandwiches and whip up some mayonnaise."

The Brand sisters, their sleeves rolled up, were almost immediately busy in the spotless kitchen of the spotless house. Zudie cut thin slices from loaves of sandwich bread, while Anna set up a great clatter with a spoon and bowl. Marietta Leacy, her large-boned body encased in a gingham bungalow apron, was everywhere, managing everything.

"Spiced ham!" exclaimed Anna, her mouth watering at sight of the tender joint being eased into an oven of the electric range.

"Sugar cured," smiled Miss Leacy. "I hate to give myself over to the prevalent California vice—which is boasting—but I must say that our state raises the divinest hogs!"

She was lifting lid after lid from pots and skillets on the top of the stove.

"Chile con carne," she said, sniffing into the depths. Then she passed over and peered down into a deeper vessel. "Frijoles in olive oil. Do you hate Mexican cooking the way some people do?"

"I adore it!" cried Zudie. "It burns your mouth so deliciously—a sort of pleasant agony, like a falling in love."

"You speak from experience?" asked Miss Leacy, stirring busily at a juvenile saucepan.

"The experience of thistledown!" declared Anna.

Marietta's rugged face, bending over her work, was still and thoughtful for a moment.

"This house," she said at last, as if bent upon her own topic, "isn't any bigger than a pint of cider. A farmer used to live here, but Dunc had it remodeled in 1913—before the war, when labor was plenty. He breaks out every now and then with a plan to build something imposing on the English style, with a porte-cochère, servants' quarters, baronial hall downstairs and everything on a large scale. Dunc simply can't think in retail."

"He looks at things in a big way," Anna found herself saying.

"He's a pretty big man," said Marietta, and went on stirring.

Her face seemed to soften with the praise. Always Dunc! Her heart, unclaimed by husband or children of her own, had been given to fostering a brother's greatness.

"Speaking of fire," drawled Dunc Leacy, having stamped through the kitchen with a huge armful of wood and dumped it noisily upon the hearthstones beyond. "Speaking of fire, who's done anything about mixing the punch?"

"Oh, glory!" shouted Zudie at mention of the forbidden word.

"He keeps the keys to the cellar," explained Marietta, as though confiding the secret to her saucepan. "He doesn't so much as let a dog smell the door. He moans in his sleep for fear the prohibition officer will set fire to the house and take away his kegs. I wonder what he'll do when it's all gone?"

"That'll be about 1942," admitted Dunc, swinging a bunch of keys on the end of a chain.

"Then he'll be moving to France and teaching the farmers how to gather grapes by machinery," Marietta told the saucepan.

"There's no reason why that couldn't be done," retorted the farmer engineer as he retreated toward the cellar door.

Later on, when they were setting small tables in the living-room and bringing in chairs from the porch and bedroom, Dunc Leacy asked Anna, "Do you like to dance?"

"I used to," said she.

"We're so out of practice that our knees creak," complained Zudie. "But I'll dance if it kills me."

"It'll kill you all right," promised Marietta, "when you hear Bill Huniker making night hideous with that old clarinet of his. Dunc at the piano is even worse."

"You'll never hear anybody's knees creak when once we get started," grinned Dunc.

And this was no idle boast, as events proved when evening waned into night.

ii

The country gentlemen of the delta came trooping in with their wives and fiancées at the hungry hour of seven. Superficially they appeared to be any members of any golf club, rejoicing informally. Everybody was on intimate terms with everybody else, and in all the men there seemed to be that spirit of young adventure which gave charm to Dunc Leacy. Many of them had been college mates. Some of the families had intermarried; and that others were looking forward to such a happy consolidation was evidenced by Bill Huniker's younger brother, who devoted his evening to the golden-haired daughter of a prosperous pear orchardist from up the river.

Dunc Leacy's romance seemed to be progressing also. She was a vivacious little brunette from up Oroville way. Her father, Anna heard from surrounding gossip, was an olive grower. Her name was Sallie Bowen, and it was impossible to deny her prettiness. While Dunc stood at the sideboard slicing sugar-cured ham she was always at his side, pretending to help while she adored him with her Spanish eyes. Anna wondered if the girl was as pretty as Zudie, and her protective instinct for the little sister caused her to sigh and wish that Zudie could fall in love with as fine a man as Leacy.

After the ham slicing Dunc came over to Anna's table and took the next chair. Sallie had a seat on his other side. The girl from Oroville was no great talker—or did Dunc's attentions to Anna pique her to the point of silence? Her expressive eyes were always caressing him, and once or twice they exchanged glances. Anna concluded that Leacy was something of a philanderer. He was obviously

a favorite with the ladies. But he kept up a running fire of banter with the men round his table.

"Killed any Japs this week, Artie?" he sang out, addressing a plump young man who seated himself beside Zudie with a second helping of everything on the bill.

"Don't mention 'em!" he growled, reddening with rage. "I'm through—get me?—through! I'm playing Hindus now, and getting a day's work out of 'em, too."

"Artie had a gang of Japs walk out on him last week," explained Dunc as soon as he found time to occupy the vacant chair at Anna's side. "He got so sore that I thought he was going to declare war right away."

"Is there any danger?" asked Anna, scared at the thought.

"Of war?"

Dunc and his belligerent friend Artie grinned at the thought.

"My dear lady," said Artie, after a mouthful of chile con carne, "the war is on right now. I don't mean machine guns and battleships and tin Kelleys. The hard-thinking, intellectual old gentlemen running the Japanese Government don't want any more of that sort of rough stuff. They'll never run amuck the way the Kaiser did and bleed themselves to death with a fool military program. All this newspaper talk is merely a smoke barrage to keep our minds off what Japan is really putting over."

"Artie was an officer in our Siberian job," interjected Dunc.

"Well, what are they putting over?" asked Anna, seeing here another aspect of the deep-rooted California race prejudice.

"Peaceful war. The conquest of the world by agriculture, commerce, immigration, secret treaties, counterfeit labels, soft words, hard bargains and the Japanese genius for teamwork. To accommodate their little expedition into Siberia I saw them build barracks that looked big enough

to put up half the imperial army. What for? To send in more troops and fight it out? Not on your life! Pretty soon the Japanese troops will fade away and those comfortable barracks will be full of farmers, tradesmen and mechanics. Shan-tung all over again. They're the greatest real-estate men in the world. They took Shan-tung for the good of humanity, and they're keeping it for the good of Japan. I don't blame them. If I were a Jap I'd do the same. There's standing room only in Japan, and the race is suffocating."

Artie's editorial was cut short by the call of Dunc's boss. "Some of you strong men come roll up this rug!"

A half dozen athletes leaped to her service, and the floor was cleared for dancing. Dunc Leacy, rolling up his sleeves, squared himself on the piano stool and came crashing down on the keys. Miss Bowen, unable to have a part in his new work, lingered and adored a moment by the piano before she was whirled away against the shoulder of an urgent young man.

Bill Huniker's clarinet, just as Dunc had threatened, was the star of the occasion. No sooner had its gawky owner, puff-cheeked and gnome-eyed as the Pied Piper, pursed his lips over the reeds than the instrument shrieked like some wild creature at death's door.

"For the love of Mike, Bill!" pleaded his wife.

"I can't help it," declared Bill. "I found the baby driving nails with it yesterday. It'll be all right when we warm up."

They warmed right heartily and without more ado. Dunc Leacy, revealing a fine skill at ragtime, rattled the keys to the jaunty cadence of "You'll Be Surprised." The awful squalls and explosions of Bill Huniker's instrument added a certain barbaric excitement to the tune.

"It's perfect jazz!" cried Zudie, clasped against the expansive chest of the ex-officer from Siberia.

Anna shared in the excitement when a big-muscled

planter came over and claimed her for the dance. The room was populous with couples, whirling and executing fancy steps to the strains of Dunc's orchestra. A young produce broker from New York, suaver and paler faced than the others, cut in.

Here was life! Anna Bly danced and danced until her feet were tired. She went at it with all the enthusiasm of a worldly woman who had been robbed of the pleasure that had been food and drink to her. And it was for Zudie that she was happiest, for the little sister's cheeks were like peonies, her eyes a-sparkle as she went from admirer to admirer. How was Zudie to endure the solitude of a farm much longer?

At last Dunc Leacy's hands came down on the keys with a crash.

"Aw, say," he roared, "don't you people ever get tired?"

"I don't," declared Bill Huniker, emitting a death toot from his damaged instrument.

"If somebody will choke Bill," volunteered Miss Leacy, "I'll play."

Whereupon there ensued a strenuous session of Bill-choking. Enthusiastic volunteers sprang upon his lanky form from all sides. But Bill Huniker proved a most difficult subject for the amateur garroters. At last, however, they bore him down by superior force of numbers. The black-eyed girl from Oroville got his clarinet away from him, and Mrs. Huniker hid it somewhere in the kitchen.

The dance went on to Miss Leacy's energetic thumping upon the keyboard.

"I'm hot as ginger," complained Dunc after he had tried a dance with Anna and proved to his satisfaction and hers that he needed instruction. "If you don't mind my starting in where I left off at two o'clock this morning let's go outside and talk."

As they moved toward the veranda Anna had an impression of dangerous black eyes following their retreat. But the girl from Oroville was dancing with Bill Huniker.

They found a seat outside amidst striped cushions on the comfortable box hammock.

"I suppose you're thinking," he began, "that we do this every night. Well, we don't. But it all goes to prove that the farmer nowadays has something to do after dark."

"Where but in California," asked Anna, "could you find a farm party like this going full tilt in the midst of the fields?"

"Speaking in praise or censure?" he quizzed her with his Anglo-Saxon eyes.

"Oh, praise!"

"Pshaw!" said Dunc teasingly. "I thought you were going to knock California. I sort of wished you would. If we only heard a little less boosting we'd stop being the most conceited people on the face of the earth. We've heard so much of the oh-and-ah business, and nice tourists standing saying, 'Ain't Nature grand!' that we just can't bear to hear anything but praise. We're like a lot of prima donnas—perfect drunkards for applause. And if people don't come across quick enough with the glad hand we begin telling about ourselves. We have the grandest sunsets and the biggest grapefruit and the prettiest women in the world—we admit it. California is the spoiled beauty of the States."

"Well, you have everything," laughed Anna, not forgetting the girl from Oroville.

"Look out! Next you know you'll have *me* admitting it. Didn't we invent the oyster cocktail and the turkey trot? Didn't we discover that salad should be served before soup? Haven't we Hiram W. Johnson to protect us single-handed against that perfectly awful menace, the

League of Nations? We live in an empire all by ourselves. We're perfect, and getting better all the time."

"You must be terribly bitter against your state!" cried Anna, though his laughing eyes reassured her.

"No, I'm not. But our self-satisfaction sometimes scares me. State love with us is an infatuation. It almost amounts to a religious mania. A fire and a quake couldn't discourage San Francisco. The people there just set their city back again on every hill that they adored and would die for, and when the job was done they went to work and told the world all about it. We Californians are like the people of Gascony—incurable boasters; but when the time comes we surprise the world by doing just what we said we would do."

"Well, you're showing a humble spirit," laughed Anna.

"We've got enough to be proud of," he agreed. "I can't help admitting being a hypocrite."

"Oceans and mountains of things!" she said.

"But the trouble with us is that under the skin we're jealous of the thing we call the East. Very few of us will admit that, but it's so. The East still holds the reins of power—more wealth, more population, more tradition behind it."

"You'll have all those things in time," she assured him.

Leacy looked over the moonlit orchards, and his voice took on a note of prophecy as he said: "All those things and more. We're destined to be a great empire and a freer race than the world has known before. Civilization will flow and flow to the great new sea, the Pacific; San Francisco will be another city of the world."

He fell into musings again, and when he roused himself he brought the flat of his hand down and said: "But it's got to be ours. By heaven, it's got to be!"

"What do you mean by that?" she asked.

Leacy was stirred like one roused from a dream.

"Nothing much."

His good-natured grin came back as he looked round to behold the girl from Oroville standing framed in the screen door.

"Shall we join the hilarity?" he asked in the manner of a man who has been summoned.

iv

The next morning he coaxed the Brand sisters to stay over for lunch.

"I'll loaf a day if you will," he promised.

"Nothing could be fairer than that," admitted Anna's little sister.

Zudie was snatched away by the Hunikers for a motor drive round an adjacent island.

"As a professional farmerette," declared Dunc to Anna, "it's your duty to see how we do it."

Therefore he took her in his car for a drive through the vast asparagus farms and the extensive acres which he owned.

It was a happy morning for Anna Bly. To be taken in hand by a strong man, devoted to her welfare, was a comfort to her feminine heart. Deny the truth as she would, yet it was so. As Dunc Leacy turned the wheel incessantly to guide them over twisted roads along the wind-swept island she woke from her spell to wonder at the starry spaces dividing her from the life she had known.

Two years ago! Was it but two years ago that the shock of war which had torn the breast of her beloved had inflicted so sore a wound in her own heart? Here in a scene so new, an environment so different from any she had known, she struggled to remember the thing she had once struggled to forget. It might have been something which had beautified a girlish dream and passed away like a vision in the mist. His memory was fading from her mind, and

yet they had lived nine years together and loved each other very dearly.

"Looks pretty much like a desert waste, doesn't it?" asked Dunc Leacy's voice in her ear.

Anna's dreaming eyes woke to the wide-spreading acres, bare ground ridged in long rows, not a green thing showing anywhere.

"Why, you've just planted it!" she exclaimed.

Dunc Leacy chuckled.

"Under those dirt ridges," he said, "there lies the richest asparagus bed in the state. The roots are six, eight and ten years old. If you'd been here a few weeks ago you'd have seen a lot of stalks shooting through the rows. We were cutting the grass green then for the New York market. But the trick now is to keep it covered with peat soil so it'll come white. The canneries won't use anything but white asparagus."

A squad of Herculean men were laboring along the ridges, working blindly like clam diggers as they thrust spade-ended spears through the soil. After each thrust they would stoop down to bring up a handful of asparagus.

"How in the world do they know where to stick their spears?" asked Anna, astounded.

"They get pretty foxy," said Dunc. "I sometimes think they must locate it by sense of smell—they never miss a shot!"

The grass cutters looked up showing merry Southern faces crowned with curly hair. They smiled and saluted jauntily, a pleasant sight to see.

"Portuguese," explained the farmer-engineer.

"You simply can't help liking them," said Anna.

"They're a good sort and splendid workmen, but they have one fault. They work themselves out of a job in four months, and the rest of the year they loaf round the city spending their money. In the spring they come back to me

dressed like race-track touts, dead broke and crazy to cut grass again."

Over the broad plantation all the dark-skinned tribes of men labored in the sunny wind. Japanese mechanics drove caterpillar tractors up and down, drawing harrows and the ingenious ridge-making machines of Dunc's invention. Muscular Chinamen pushed hand cars laden with the new-cut asparagus into washing sheds, where other swarthy people kept count of the day's gathering. Out of an irrigation ditch a square-built man, dark as a negro but with fine Caucasian features, rose and smiled. Above the ridges other heads peered forth, black-turbaned heads with curling beards and fierce dark eyes.

"Morning, Dowli!" called out the master of the place.

"Morning, sair!"

"There's too much water standing on the west end of the patch. Must be getting pretty acid by now. Drain 'er off."

"Yes, sair!"

The black man touched his hat and smiled his ingratiating smile.

"Portuguese?" asked Anna as soon as they had passed on.

"Guess not!" drawled Dunc Leacy. "He's an East Indian."

"Strange," said Anna. "He seemed to look at us with—with our sort of eyes."

"The Japs never look that way, do they?" he asked, turning inquisitively.

"I suppose not. But we can't hold that against them."

"I can never read but one thing in a Jap's eyes," he confessed, "and that's a desire to conceal what he wants. Camouflage ought to be a Japanese word. Did you ever hear of the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company? No? Or of K. Sato, its president? No?"

Since Anna was unable to answer to his satisfaction, he

returned to the topic which his sudden question had interrupted.

"There's a Caucasian strain in the East Indians, some say. When this man Dowli came here he wore a turban six yards long and called himself Dhulip Singh. After a few months he took off his turban, forgot he was a Sikh, cut his hair and changed his name to Mr. Dowli. Sounds sort of Irish, doesn't it?"

"Tell me one thing," begged Anna. "Do you hire all these dark people because the labor is cheaper?"

"My dear Mrs. Bly"—Dunc had stopped his car to examine a faulty ditch by the road—"there's no such thing as cheap labor any more. Every laborer from cockneys to Digger Indians is charging all that traffic will bear. It is another case of supply and demand. America lost somewhere between two and four million workmen by the European war. We're suffering from a labor drought, and the employer is paying part of the bill, the consumer the rest. If you want to run down that illusive devil, H. C. L., just come to the farm and see how much it costs to raise a hill o' beans."

At the hour of noon, when they had encircled the island and were headed again toward luncheon in the Leacy farmhouse, Dunc turned his clear eyes upon her and asked in his direct way, "How did you and your sister ever come to be running a farm?"

"It belonged to my husband—originally to his father," replied Anna. "And I'm—I'm a widow. Zudie and I both wanted something to do. It seemed such a good chance to make something out of what we had."

How she wished that she knew him well enough to confide her troubles with the strawberry pickers!

"I certainly like your pluck," declared he. "With that and a little knowledge of farming you ought to pull out all right."

"We're learning every day," she said.

She thought she could trace something satiric in the steady gaze he held upon her.

"Everything going without a hitch, I suppose."

She had been on the point of taking him into her confidence, but his manner turned her from her decision.

"Oh, splendidly!" she said. But after a pause she weakened sufficiently to add: "What a figure I must have cut when you came to the rescue!"

"I didn't expect to find you pouring tea," he chuckled.

As they were climbing the hill toward the white gate he cleared his throat in the manner of a shy man about to speak.

"I hope you're going to let us get a look at you now and then," he said. "And if anything bobs up, please ask us to kick in. The unexpected is always happening in our business, you know."

It was on their way home that afternoon, the right-hand Bud being at the wheel, that Anna and her sister had a chance to exchange brief views on the subject of the Leacys.

"Aren't they wonderful!" exclaimed Zudie, speaking into Anna's ear in order that their chauffeur should not be a party to the conversation.

"It's hard to believe that anybody could be so nice," admitted Anna. "And Mr. Leacy's enormously interesting, I think." After a moment she added, "He has nice flat ears."

CHAPTER XIII: CONSCIENCE IN THE TEMPLE

i

AMONG the sheds and poultry houses to the rear of the Brand farmhouse there stood a grim, low gallows, which Anna, since the suicide of Shimba's divorced wife, had never been able to look upon without a shudder. At the end of a stout beam projecting from the inverted L a block and tackle added to the deathly aspect of the contrivance. A low platform stood by the gallows, and right beneath the hanging beam a primitive furnace arrangement, all blackened with former fires, hinted that innumerable martyrs had been roasted and hanged all in one grand *auto-da-fé*.

These forbidding devices, as a matter of plain fact, had been set there for the purpose of dipping prunes; and Anna lost her distaste for the sight as the season waxed and fruit began ripening in her orchards. The ghastly-looking contrivance was nothing more than the old-fashioned prune dipper which Dunc Leacy had satirized as a relic out of Noah's ark. From that gallows tree, she knew, a basket would swing to be lowered into the hot lye solution in a kettle below. Here labor would be busy for her benefit, heavy trays would be borne away to the drying grounds and she would gloat over tons of potential wealth.

Anna had learned from her occasional talks with white farmers that her prune-dipping outfit was grotesquely out of date. All the progressive growers—particularly in the Santa Clara Valley, where the prune is king—had adopted modern dipping machines, in which the fruit goes into one end, strikes the hot lye and comes out of the other end

sorted into two or three grades and neatly spread on trays.

She had priced one of these machines in Stockton, and hesitated. Already she had spent the greater part of her surplus on household decorations, an automobile and the numerous farm improvements which Shimba had demanded. But she had resolved upon this final extravagance until Shimba had shown an unexpected desire to save her money.

"That very old-fashion dip good enough, shank you," he had sipped politely. "We use him considerable year before. Japanese boy work him this time O. K."

Shimba was indeed thoughtful of her interests!

Upon the afternoon of her return from the Leacy ranch Anna saw two figures standing under the gallows tree of her antiquated prune dipper. So absorbed in conversation were they that they seemed unconscious of the big car slipping through the Bly gate.

Glowering through the vines of the veranda, another figure added a final touch to the dramatic picture. It was Susan Skelley, and it required no keen observer to see that her pessimistic eyes were spying upon the two figures under the prune gallows.

"What's happened, Susan?" asked Anna.

"Nawthin' yit," moaned Susan Skelley. "But wud ye see that Chinee dude, now!"

Peering through the vines, Anna took a curious view of the plotters, and was relieved to see no more terrible persons than Mr. Shimba, Esquire, and Mr. Oki, of the Beneficent Society. The attitude of the farmer expressed respect verging upon awe; the fashionable young local secretary stood upright, commanding, as he indulged in gestures which seemed to include the entire landscape.

"No sooner ye're off the place," croaked Susan, "than he's on ut, an' bad luck to him. Ye'd think he'd mortgaged th' far-r-rm and was handin' ut over to th' king av Asia."

Mr. Oki must have heard the querulous note and caught

sight of skirts among the branches, for he turned suddenly to leave Shimba under the gallows tree as he came jauntily over to where Anna and Zudie stood.

"Ah, ladies," he smiled, raising his pearl-gray fedora, "let me welcome you home again!"

"Thank you, Mr. Oki," said Anna, not exactly pleased at this show of hospitality on her own farm.

"I hope you have enjoyed a view of the delta country. And this Mr. Leacy—a fine man. So many of my people have dealings with him."

"Has your society reporter been following us round?" upspoke the pert voice of Zudie.

"That is a nice joke to remember!" he giggled amiably. "I wish I could remember American jokes! Such nice jokes!"

Even as he confessed deficiency in American humor, which all Japanese at once admire and fail to understand, his lavender-cuffed hands were searching in his pockets to bring out two small boxes adorned with flowery tinsel and bearing Japanese labels.

"Permit me!" he smiled, handing the larger of the packets to Anna and the smaller to Zudie. "These are some slight memories to welcome you back. That is tea, Mrs. Bly. Maybe you will learn to like our green tea—very good vintage."

He sipped through his teeth and bowed again.

"How very nice of you!" declared Anna, wheedled out of any annoyance she might have felt.

Zudie, having stripped the paper cover from her parcel, found a slender lacquer box, ornate with golden birds and flowers. When she opened it she discovered a number of flat gray sticks.

"Sandalwood," explained Oki. "Very nice to burn, if you will forgive our heathen custom. Its smoke keeps memory warm."

"That's kind of you," said Zudie, but her thanks were less cordial than her sister's had been.

"I was just idly loafing round," Mr. Oki continued, "wasting my time as usual. This climate makes us dream, don't you think? And all day I have been wondering when you should come back to decorate our poor surroundings. You will be surprised, Mrs. Bly and Miss Brand, but I have an invitation for you."

"For us?" chorused the surprised sisters.

"The Bly, California, Japanese Buddhist Temple has its official opening next Sunday afternoon. Mr. Akagashi of the drug store was so thoughtful to think maybe you would like see it. Therefore he appointed me to be your host there."

"Why, Mr. Oki," cried Zudie, "I thought you were a Christian and that the Beneficent Society would have nothing to do with the temple."

"Ah, do not misconstrue us!" he begged, with his cocoa-butter smile. "I merely go as a favor to Mr. Akagashi, who is a Buddhist quite unofficially. The society would abhor to interfere with any religious belief. See how it allows those two great teachings to flourish beside each other in our town!"

"I should certainly love to see the official opening," admitted Anna. "And thank Mr. Akagashi for thinking of us."

"I shall make my call at two o'clock," said Mr. Oki with a diplomatic flourish to his modish hat. "And Miss Brand must not fail us also."

The days that followed were bleak and dull for Anna Bly. She had lost her first enthusiasm for the golden enterprise which had brought her to California. And the wanton waste of her berry crop had wakened her to the seriousness of her task. Not only the whim of wind and water

and germinating seeds, but the whim of man could conspire toward her bankruptcy. Shimba had managed to bring a motley throng of pickers into the patch, but they were all too few for the work. Anna's own poor labor on hands and knees and Zudie's inadequate groping among the vines did little toward saving the fruit. The strawberry season was already on the wane, and they had fallen three hundred dollars short of normal profit.

On Friday afternoon Mr. Cyprian Helmholtz, the speculator in farms and mortgages, made his second call of the season. He was a fat little man with pinkish eyes, hair and complexion. The ill-concealed scorn with which he surveyed the ranch set Anna against him at once.

"You should have taken me up when I offered you that eight hundred an acre," he said with a sneer which he had doubtless intended to pass off with a smile. "Shimba tells me that the berry crop's already on the bum—no sense in growing berries on this soil anyhow. Somebody's done you dirt—and I can tell you who. The shippers 've been sending your berries back, calling 'em damaged, simply because they're oversupplied this year and don't want to stand up to their bargain."

"The shippers claim that the pickers damaged my berries," Anna defended herself.

"Bunk! Shimba's an experienced Jap. This isn't the first time he ever saw a strawberry, and he wouldn't be letting his pickers spoil the goods."

Without bothering about her permission, Mr. Helmholtz lit a freckled cigar and cocked it toward his right eye as he announced: "A farm's no place for a lady. That's what I said when I heard you were coming out here. There's more tricks in this business than you'll find in a box of fleas. Now you ought to take my advice and sell out before it's too late."

"I've already had a larger offer than you made," said Anna.

“Who?”

One of Helmholtz's red eyes gleamed round the freckled cigar.

“Mr. Oki says he can find a buyer at nine hundred.”

“Don't put much faith in what that Jap says,” cautioned the speculator. “But I'll tell you what I can do. I can bring you in an offer for a thousand an acre to-morrow if you'll listen to reason.”

Anna stood thinking for a moment. Instinctively she turned her pure brow toward the west, for out there she knew dwelt a strong man who had promised to be her counselor. Then her ingrained conventionality raised an objection. She couldn't lay her burdens at the feet of a man whom she knew so slightly.

“I think I'll keep my property,” she told the pinkish broker at her side.

“You're very foolish,” he declared through a puff of smoke which seemed to stifle the open air.

“Good afternoon,” she smiled. “You can drive your car right round back of the house and get out by the other way.”

iii

That was Friday, and it was on the following Sunday morning that Anna and Zudie dressed as for an occasion. That afternoon they were to attend the opening of the Bly, California, Japanese Buddhist Temple.

Out in the little brown houses by the river preparations were going forward on a more elaborate scale. Mr. Shimba and the Matsu family, all of whom had soaked in the family bath box until a late hour the night before, were arraying themselves in splendor befitting so rare an event. Four of the Matsu children—John, Violet, Mary and Clarence—had gone to the Methodist Sunday school in purest white, which they were to wear later as lotus children at the pagan ceremony across the way.

All morning Mrs. Matsu had worked like a drudge among the neighborhood women who came to her kitchen to help make fish dumplings for the big spread to be given in the loft above Akagashi's store after the dedication. So busy had she been that she had scarce given herself time to get into her machine-embroidered shirt waist ere Matsu, arrayed as for a wedding or a funeral, bade her hurry lest she keep forty or fifty thousand gods awaiting her woman's vanity.

The streets of Bly swarmed as they had never swarmed before. Many prominent Japanese came in high-powered cars from as far away as Stockton and Ofu—which the long-haired ones call Sacramento—and some had even ventured forth from the Mulberry Port of So Ko. Most of these mighty gentlemen wore black frock coats which fell robelike almost to their ankles. Some of the local dignitaries—notably Mr. Akagashi of the general store—were frock coated too. Bly was proud of Mr. Akagashi that day, for out of the seedy sweater and cheap overalls of ordinary usage he had sprung like a moth from a cocoon, sleek coated in the respectable costume that elder statesmen wear during audiences with the Mikado.

Farmers, unaccustomed to Sunday clothes and worldly splendors, came rumbling along in their battered flivvers. The springs creaked with the load of wives and white-clad children. Several holy bonzes, especially long as to frock coats and bright as to spectacles, arrived in an important carload. K. Fushigami's Billiard and Pool Parlor had taken on an ecclesiastical atmosphere, for it was here that a very holy bonze assembled all the lotus children and painted a little black spot over each eyebrow to indicate purity in the sight of the All Wise. And to each child was given a lovely paper lotus flower, while an amiable lady of the congregation moved about wiping each little nose, a rare attention in the quaint town of Bly.

At the hour of two many curious yokels, their mouths

hanging open, were drifting in and out of the brand-new Buddhist temple. They stood in knots before the proscenium arch with its lacquered folding doors and the great golden altar whose ten thousand carven prayers, symbolic urns, incense burners and scarlet brocade lining had cost six thousand yen in the best factory in Tokio.

There were golden lotus urns hung with prayers; innumerable bronze incense bowls smoked on the sacred table before the shrine. In a far corner of the room sat a new upright piano, and this was undoubtedly the shrine's rival attraction. The white-clad children of the colony, despite the holy spots on every forehead, behaved like little demons round the fascinating swivel stool. None passed the piano without running stubby fingers over the keys. Women carrying babies in their arms and clattering the prayer beads round their wrists stopped to smile gummy smiles at the enchanting sound of the stylish American instrument.

Shimba gaped among the crowd out in the lobby, and with wonder-stricken eyes he read the names of many hundreds of his countrymen, faithful worshipers of the same Buddha, written on innumerable wooden tablets suspended row after row along the wall. Urged by a vanity peculiar to no one race, he searched rapidly along the line until he found his own name written among the rest—Shimba Jiro. But whose name was that displayed so neatly in Chinese script on the tablet beside his own? Hana-san—the wife he had foresworn to death!

Must she remain forever there on the tablets of his family, to speak to him in her ghostly voice even at the gates of *Dai Butsu*? Shimba's knees trembled in superstitious awe, for like so many of his people he had mixed the myths of Shinto and the philosophies of Buddha inextricably in his mind. Here in the presence of the very shrine which old Hana had worked so slavishly to buy her name glared down on him, accusing him.

"What do you think of our temple now, Mr. Shimba?" asked a cheerful voice in English at his ear.

Turning like a guilty thing, Shimba beheld Mr. Akagashi in his statesmanlike garments.

"Ah, Honorable Akagashi!" cried Shimba in his own language. "All the world has come to see the wonderful sight."

"We are a little late," admitted the storekeeper. "The High School Cadets' Band from Stockton has not arrived on time."

"Then we shall have a band also?" asked Shimba, his eyes brightening.

"We are sparing nothing in the way of style," smiled the great one. "I wonder what the Reverend Professor Awaga will be thinking now? They say he had very little to do this morning save to open his church and close it again."

"Most of his congregation were home preparing for our grand opening," smiled Shimba.

"We shall do nothing to injure him," declared Akagashi piously. "Dai Butsu teaches us to be kind to all beliefs. Also the Methodists are very useful friends when we need them."

Across the way the Reverend Professor Awaga, his tiny form as carefully frock-coated as that of any bonze, could be seen gazing spellbound upon the moral breakdown in Bly. His wife, the little teacher, came for an instant and stood at his side. Then the two disappeared behind the front door of the church.

There was a great stir just then along the main street. The High School Cadets' Band, borne fashionably in twin sixes, had arrived in force. Short-legged men and women, each with a string of prayer beads at the wrist, came waddling in to scramble for good places among the cheap

pine chairs. Members of the cadets' band, noisy and uncouth as sixteen will always be, swung up the aisle to reserved seats on the front row.

Presently silence fell. The priests of Dai Butsu, black silk robes over their American clothes, filed in to sit against the wall on either side of the altar. The high priest, a very holy old man, who had founded and ordained more than sixty similar temples in the state of California, seated himself before the sacred table, his back to the congregation.

A dog barked, then howled dismally, acknowledging a kick. Silence fell again.

The high priest raised his drumstick and smote the bronze prayer gong. A trembling, deep-toned voice of Asia vibrated through the bare-walled room. Scarcely had the echo died away when the priests, sitting stiffly against the wall, their hands folded, their eyes fixed on the altar, began their long, undeviating, monotonous chant. Shimba did not understand it; not a man, woman or child in the audience understood it, because it was in Sanskrit. But it wailed and echoed like the soul of holy Ganges calling the world to prayer in days of old.

When the chant had ceased there came a clatter of many little feet from the rear of the temple. The children were coming! A hundred of them, all in white, each one carrying his long-stemmed paper lotus flower, they thronged up the aisles, a three-forked procession, toward the golden altar. Children too young to walk, gowned in white, were carried in the line, Buddha's two sacred spots painted on their foreheads. Their flat faces impassive, their blossoms waving mechanically, they advanced like a snow-white army to gather before the shrine and stand during the high priest's invocation. Then they melted away. Again the priests, sitting stiffly against the wall, chanted the monotonous repetition of Buddha's holy name.

Presently Mr. Akagashi, being master of ceremonies, rose briskly and took the platform. His appearance was

greeted with most unchurchly salvos of applause. With many smiles and nods he saluted the faithful and assured them that the temple of Dai Butsu was destined to become a great business success, as all great things should be nowadays. He thanked the farmers for their small contributions and added that money had come miraculously from wealthy believers all over the state. His résumé of the situation hinted that Buddha was not too far lost in his Nirvana to look out for his own.

"Our Most Holy Mikado has blessed these auspices," he added in conclusion, "and we will now hear a selection from the High School Cadets' Band."

The High School Cadets' Band was heard from. Without further warning a brassy tribe of tubas, trombones and cornets set up a bray that shook the windows in their sashes and caused the priests at the altar to look round from their holy meditations. "The Kansas Honeymoon March" was the title of their selection. A wispy youth blowing a saxophone led the onslaught upon harmony, punctuating every false note with jerky movements of his elbows. The people of Little Japan sat entranced, glorying in the sound, and when it was done their horny hands created another uproar before the golden shrine.

v

From a good seat near the altar Anna Bly saw and heard everything. Mr. Oki, wearing a gardenia and all that goes with that fashionable flower, sat beside the Brand sisters and translated wherever he thought it necessary.

"Who is the stout gentleman just getting up to speak?" Anna asked.

"That's Mr. Edward Akagashi—our Mr. Akagashi's cousin. He's a banker gentleman from Stockton."

Mr. Edward Akagashi was a great favorite, as witness the frequent interruptions for applause. He spoke earn-

estly, with the exaggerated movement of the lip muscles which the Japanese employ in impressive periods.

"What is he saying?" Zudie begged of her interpreter.

Mr. Oki was silent for a long while, then he explained.

"He was speaking about our inferiority. He say that we might have shorter legs than white men, more peculiar eyes than Americans; that our teeth sometimes stick out where they should stick in; that our feet are sometimes crooked where they should be straight——"

The whispered interpretation was interrupted by an avalanche of applause. Anna looked back over row upon row of little men; she had the impression of a people over-worked, underfed, obsessed by the problem of clinging to this poor planet. The speaker rippled on.

"What did he say then?" she asked.

"With all our faults they cannot jeer us with one quality," smiled Oki. "We have souls the same size as anybody else!"

"Indeed you have!" said Anna, impressed and touched. Mr. Oki smiled again.

From his seat farther back Shimba took in every word of the exercises. To his peasant mind it meant little whether it was Buddhist or Shinto. The sacred ceremony had been ordered by the Mikado to hearten his people in a far country. The irrelevant noises in the room irritated him. He turned to hush a pack of gossiping schoolgirls who whispered together, paying small heed to the holy words. Somewhere outside that pestiferous dog barked again. Somebody laughed inanely.

Another dignitary occupied the platform. This time it was a prosperous fruit-land operator from Stockton. He was a thin gray man with prominent teeth, but his words burned like fire into Shimba's soul.

"It is written that the seed of Yamato shall flourish on the soil of many lands. It is a good seed and it shall not die. Here in this land, which we call the Rice Country,

many barbarian customs hedge us round. We have learned those customs, not to weaken ourselves but to grow stronger. It is not the wish of our holy master that we should depart from the ways of Nippon. Let us not forget that we are Japanese. Let us bend every effort that we shall remain loyal sons of the sun-born land!

"And it is with that thought to-day that our strong guides in learning and patriotism have dedicated our holy temple."

Shimba sat entranced. Yet above the words of wisdom he seemed to hear the cry of that woman whose soul the fox spirit had maddened. His name was next to hers on the honorable tablets by the door. Out of the confusion of his dreams he heard his name spoken melodiously from the platform. At first he thought it only a part of his dream. He looked again and saw that the master of ceremonies had taken the floor.

"This high-honorable altar," the speaker was saying, "has been given to us by the humble devotion of one holy woman, now passed to her reward. With her own hands she collected the money, going from door to door. From her place among the gods she sees it to-day with the eyes of the spirit. Let us honor the name of that very pious woman, Hana-san, and her good works upon earth which made this very holy shrine possible!"

Shimba the farmer held tightly to the rounds of his chair, his eyes popping through the slits in his mask.

"And since that good and humble woman is not with us to speak in the flesh, let me call upon her first of kin. Shimba-san, honored among us, will say a few words in behalf of the departed."

Shimba sat perfectly rigid in his chair. Every sharp black eye in the congregation seemed turned upon him.

"Shimba-san, honorably deign to ascend the platform," invited the speaker with a smile.

Stiff as a ramrod, Shimba came to his feet. All the

discipline of early military training asserted itself as he walked punctiliously toward the altar of Buddha. He mounted the platform and poised there, a man of wood from head to toe.

"I thank you honorably in the name of my house," he said mechanically, and bobbing like a marionette he marched back to his seat.

vi

It was after four o'clock when Anna plucked her sister by the sleeve and led her away. Mr. Oki accompanied them to the door and protested amiably that more was to come. But the brassy riot of the High School Cadets' Band, the continual passing in and out of farmers' wives—their bodies bent double in their postures of politeness—the smell of incense, fresh paint and perfume, the singing of gospel hymns with Buddha's name clumsily introduced where the name of Christ had been, the banging of the prayer gong, the monotonous rippling of Japanese orators, all combined and created desire to escape into the fresh air.

Once outside on the automobile-cluttered street, Anna turned and went over toward the Methodist church.

"Where are you going now?" asked Zudie, herself quite wearied with the spectacle.

"I want to say a word to Mrs. Awaga," said Anna.

"Why?"

"I really don't know."

The door of the church was locked. There came no response when they pounded at the rear of the building, where the Awaga family lived. The Methodist church stood stark and deserted, a little bleaker and uglier than it had ever looked before.

Anna and her sister walked away toward the farmhouse gate, weaving through the Oriental throng which—like themselves—seemed to have become bored with a too exten-

sive program. Behind the double row of automobiles little boys in lotus-blossom white were flying kites, running screaming up and down as they pulled their multi-colored playthings against the wind.

One of their flying monsters, painted to resemble a great leering face with golden eyes that swiveled in the breeze, darted spitefully across the sisters' path. It would rise a little, then dart down like some infernal demon sent to plague the white people off the face of the earth.

"They get on my nerves," complained Zudie. "They seem to come straight at you like a—"

The devil-faced kite gave a final swoop and fell clattering at Anna's feet. She stooped with a smile and picked it up. Across its chin were written the same characters in Japanese—the same jet-black characters she had remarked the first hour she was on her farm.

"I wonder what they mean?" she asked, raising the kite to a level with her eyes.

It was then that a tall, picturesque tramp who had been leaning shiftlessly against some one's automobile took it upon himself to join in the conversation.

"The Japanese kite is flying very high in this town to-day, isn't it?" he ventured in a cultivated voice.

Anna, still holding the kite, looked at the man. It was an instant before she recognized him. Nondescript plaid suit, greasy Windsor tie and long yellow face; here was the Eurasian wanderer who had washed windows and philosophized under the name of Henry Johnson.

CHAPTER XIV: THE CHIMERA AGAIN

i

WHAT a fortunate coincidence!" said the eccentric Eurasian, striking a picturesque pose before the ladies. "What luck—but wasn't it Emerson who said that luck was merely a form of higher mathematics? Was it Emerson?"

He scratched his wiry black hair as though there lay the fault of failing memory.

"You have come a long way," said Anna, secretly rather pleased to see a familiar face again.

"Haven't we!" smiled the chimera. "But, as the saying goes, all the peoples of earth meet at the feet of Buddha."

He said this last with a cynical wink in the direction of the temple from which the brazen notes of trombones and tubas now brayed and tooted, indicating another selection from the High School Cadets' Band.

"Since last I saw you," went on Henry Johnson, "I have been touring the state studying your interesting American people. I have been arrested for vagrancy in five cities, Fresno, Los Angeles, Bakersfield, Stockton and Merced. I am planning a return trip to Japan very soon, and, being temporarily embarrassed for funds, I have come to you."

Standing in a shabby suit of sporting plaid—garments he had begged, borrowed or stolen somewhere—he was as fantastically out of key with Bly as he had been with New York.

"How nice of you!" laughed Zudie, moved by his grand air.

"How in the world did you find where we were?" was Anna's pertinent question.

"If all my investigations were as easy as that!" exclaimed Henry Johnson. "You are a very famous lady, Mrs. Bly."

"Am I?" Her voice was a little nervous.

"Among the Japanese," he explained. "The Oriental wireless telephone, you must know, is a very efficient thing. It works under tables, through walls, over housetops. Possibly you would call it gossip, but it is not idle gossip. As far south as Fresno I heard them mention you, but, of course, not by your name."

"What do they call me?"

"The foolish one."

"I am complimented."

"It is thus that we might speak of a butterfly that gets herself stuck in fresh asphalt just before the steam roller comes along."

"The steam roller?" echoed Zudie.

"In this case fifteen million dollars in capital—and as much more as is necessary—and a quite considerable backing, I might say."

"You are speaking in parables, Mr. Johnson," declared Anna none too cordially.

"The Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company is no parable," he smiled, seeming to gain good humor. "And K. Sato, its president, is no parable."

"Who is this K. Sato?" asked Zudie, who had a way of asking the vital question.

"My dear young lady, you might as well ask me who is Thor or—to be more modern—Beatrice Fairfax. Possibly there is a K. Sato. But why shouldn't he be merely an idea, the consensus of opinion of all the stockholders in the Natural Energy Company?"

"That is at least sufficiently unsatisfactory," Anna decided.

"You find little that is satisfactory in a poor thing like

me," admitted Henry Johnson. "The American half of me is very talkative, and like so many of your countrymen it is wandering through Little Japan looking for a job."

"You haven't really decided to work for a living?" exclaimed Zudie.

"Not for long—not for long. But my passage back to Japan will cost money, and I have no desire to go as a stowaway, though I was not too proud to come to your land under a bag of rice. I am not a stickler for high wages. Isn't that refreshing? I can do almost anything rather badly."

"Do you understand an automobile?" inquired his employer-elect.

"I drove my own for a time," he informed her languidly.

"Would you live in the Japanese quarters?"

"Rather not! They wouldn't endure me overnight."

"Well"—Anna thought a moment—"possibly we can find a place for you."

She wondered why she so much as considered a place for him, and knew that she would make one. Henry Johnson was interesting and pathetic.

"In the garage under your car," suggested he. "Or if you have a horse I might occupy the stall next to him. That is quite comfortable, I find."

As they were moving away a Japanese boy in a white sailor suit came forward and held out his hand. Anna realized his errand. She was walking away with the painted kite she had picked from the road. No sooner had she restored the gaudy plaything to its smiling owner than Henry Johnson stepped close to the boy and took a corner of his kite between thumb and finger. Very carefully he studied the intricate painting of the hideous face with its golden eyes set on swivels to roll and flash in the breeze.

"Ver-ry interesting!" he exclaimed, squinting close to the toy demon.

"What are those words written across it?" asked Zudie.
"I seem to see the same characters on all the kites."

"Yes?" Henry Johnson raised his eyebrows.

"The Japanese kite is indeed flying high in Bly," he said, and chuckled softly to himself.

Without another word he accompanied his employers along the driveway.

CHAPTER XV: CHIZO-SAN

i

WEDNESDAY following the grand opening of the Japanese Buddhist temple found Mr. Shimba, Esquire, a painfully new blue suit hanging loosely over his knotty form, trotting up the gangplank of the Department of Labor tugboat which plies between Wharf Five and the immigration station at Angel Island. Early Tuesday morning the *Siberia Maru* had anchored off Alcatraz with a bumper load of picture brides destined for as many husbands in the free states of America.

An agent of the Beneficent Society had kept Shimba posted during the anxious hours of waiting in a Geary Street boarding house. Mrs. Chizo Shimba—as the passport had her name—had become his wife by long-distance arrangement back in February, shortly before the new law went through and shortly after Shimba had got his divorce papers. The lady, whose face he had never seen save in the glassy stare of Japanese photography, had been taken to Angel Island for medical inspection. From the society's information he had learned that Chizo-san would be released to him at noon.

As the tug, whistling hoarsely, pulled away from its wharf and churned busily into the stream Shimba began pacing the deck, a prey to nervousness which brought him shame. After all, this was but a woman. She would be useful to him next year when good business fell into his hands and he was well quit of the present disagreeable arrangement with Mrs. Bly. Chizo-san's picture indicated that she was young—that was good. He knew of a farmer in Florin who had been tricked into marrying an old one.

Shimba had had sufficient experience with old women for one lifetime—the wife he had divorced was more than thirty!

He shuddered and hid himself in the lee of the cabin. At the thought of the old woman he seemed to feel that fox enchantment stealing into his soul.

“A hundred and sixty-seven came in yesterday,” Shimba could hear a nasal American voice going on in the cabin.

“There sure was an epidemic of marriage when they saw the time was getting short,” responded a foggy bass.

A boyish Japanese, trimly attired in clothing as new as Shimba’s, came swinging round the corner and bobbed politely at a sign of recognition. This man was Mr. Furo, the young clerk who had sold him a suit of clothes on that unlucky visit to Walnut Grove.

“Ah, Shimba-san!” began the boyish fellow. “I am told that Mrs. Shimba also will be waiting for you.”

“So I too am told,” Shimba grunted, pretending great indifference. “And Mrs. Furo, perhaps?”

“Oh, yes.”

Shimba saw the obvious gleam of delight on the broad brown face, and this confirmed his first impression that Furo was something of a booby.

“You are supplied with her picture, I suppose?” Shimba deigned to ask.

“That is not necessary, Shimba-san. We will know each other without identification.”

A softened look came across Furo’s face, which betrayed him a ninny according to Shimba’s well-schooled prejudice.

“I have known her ever since she was a little maid in my father’s house,” Furo went on, talking like a man too full of his subject to be stilled. “When I came to this Rice Country five years ago I promised to send for her. Silly of me, wasn’t it?”

“Perhaps!” agreed Shimba gruffly as he turned away.

Had the long-hairs driven this fellow mad? What sort

of degenerate had Furo become to be talking of love in the same breath with the name of his wife? He was unworthy to be called a Japanese!

Shimba went out of his way to avoid the fool when their boat touched noses with the Angel Island wharf. A number of Japanese, as stolid to all seeming as Shimba himself, scrambled up the walk to the white government house on the hill.

ii

Chizo-san sat, one of a long kimono-clad line, on a bench in the women's detention room upstairs. Dainty little women they were in their modest robes of dull plum color or grayish blue. Above the deep V of the garments folded so sweetly across their breasts peeked brilliant scarfs of flowered brocade—orange, purple, pink and gold. Beneath each padded skirt a pair of white-stockinged feet stood primly, each great toe stoutly holding to its sandal thong. There was a plain gold ring on every left hand so demurely resting in a padded lap; twenty heads, crowned with the luxuriant black pompadours which had been carefully arranged for the day, drooped slightly as black eyes turned timidly and small mouths moved in low conversation.

Chizo-san, as she sat there, looked very young. Her soft skin, her tender mouth, the puzzled expression of her eyes were childlike in the extreme. They were little ladies, these immigrant women from Japan; their manners were as dainty and as soft as the silks they wore. Gentleness—that would be the one impression for the spectator to carry away.

"They're meek as doves when they first come over here," the American matron would have told you had you asked. "They're too patient and sweet to give us any trouble. Once in a while they commit suicide, but they never complain about anything. Now the Chinese women are different. They'll scratch and bite like cats, once they get roused. Perhaps it's a difference in the way the men treat them."

On a bench beside a thin woman sat Chizo-san—Mrs. Chizo Shimba, as her passports had it. Yesterday morning when the boat came to anchor off the fine island near So Ko—which the long-haired ones call San Francisco—she had thought that her man would be there to meet her. But it was not to be that way. With as quaint a chorus as ever stepped out of “The Mikado” she had been sent in a tug-boat to another island to be questioned by interpreters and examined again by trained nurses.

There was nothing the matter with her! Why shouldn’t they free her to go with the man whose honorable photograph she carried? In the case of the thin woman it had been different. Kiku-san, whom the passport called Mrs. Furo, had developed a severe cold a week out from the coast of the Rice Country, which the long-haired ones call America. Chizo had stayed close by her side, because Kiku-san came from Kobe and had known her father’s family.

She had seen the poor woman’s efforts to control her coughing during medical examinations; and this morning as they sat together on the bench awaiting the hour of release Kiku-san still coughed a little, though her thin face betrayed no human weakness.

The matron, passing up and down the line with letters and telegrams, handed a yellow envelope to Kiku-san, who regarded it helplessly, then surrendered it to young Mrs. Shimba.

“You are a scholar in the American language,” she said.

Chizo-san tore open the flap and translated the brief message:

“Will be waiting for you again to-day.

“FRANK FURO.”

As soon as the telegram had been read Kiku-san cast down her eyes and asked: “Do you think I will be looking well when he comes, Chizo-san?”

"Like the mulberry tree, Kiku-san," replied Shimba's picture bride.

The sick woman's eyes were still lowered, her face immovable as she said: "I have grown older, but I do not think he will care."

"Love is not for strong men," answered Chizo-san, half believing the hard-taught maxim.

All across the broad Pacific she had heard the praise of this Furo sung in her ears. How wonderful, after all, that Kiku-san was to meet and live with a man she had known before!

"He is not a weak man," declared Kiku-san.

At this moment an interpreter came in to announce the morning's medical inspection. Kimonoed, sandaled, pompadoured, the pretty chorus stood in line, shoulders bent demurely, not a sign of anxiety on any of the doll-like faces as they filed slowly toward the honorable doctor's department beyond.

Chizo's share in the ordeal amounted to little more than a smile and a tap on the shoulder. From the English she had learned at school she was able to understand the doctor's words. She had passed her examinations among eleven others. The rest were detained, a small, sad group in a corner of the room. A nurse had pushed a chair under Kiku-san and left her sitting starkly against the wall.

"Is it decided that she cannot come away?" whispered Chizo to a big-faced little woman who had married a commission merchant.

"The lung sickness," said the woman. "She will be sent to hospital."

It was about noon when Kiku-san came out of the doctor's office. Chizo-san would have spoken to her, but she was filing by in a sorry line, attended by a white-clad nurse. The thin woman looked round and smiled when she saw her friend still waiting on the bench.

"*Sayonara!*" she called, and bobbed her head.

“*Sayonara!*” replied Chizo-san, voicing the saddest farewell that any tongue can speak. Just then an outer door swung open and an attendant bawled: “Number Twenty-seven and baggage!”

iii

Shimba’s young wife sprang to her feet, to be handed her bedding roll and the little rattan bag which contained her bath bowl and the toilet articles which had kept her dainty as a bird. Struggling down the stairs she came into the big waiting-room. A thousand bold eyes seemed to be upon her, but she was too modest to look any one in the face. She stood disconsolate, alone in the hostile circle, and she was about to flee to a secluded bench when a rough voice spoke her name.

“Chizo-san?”

“Yes, Honorable.”

She dared look no higher than the bright-blue waistcoat.

“I am Mr. Shimba.”

For an instant she looked him square in the face. How old he seemed! How withered and knotty! How different from the unwrinkled person whose photograph she carried under her kimono! This blue-coated gentleman before her bore a vivid family resemblance to the picture she knew by heart. Then a new hope inspired her as she lowered her eyes and asked timidly: “Honorable deign to inform me. Are you the father of Shimba-san, my husband?”

“I am Shimba-san, your husband,” he said, lowering his voice lest some might hear this embarrassing turn in the dialogue.

“I thank you unworthily,” declared his wife, bending her body very low in humble politeness.

“The boat leaves in fifteen minutes,” he told her. “You will find a seat here. Your baggage will be taken care of.”

Shimba stood outside smoking many cigarettes as he

waited impatiently for the man at the gangplank to give the signal. He was more than satisfied with his bargain, though his pride was hurt with the thought that she had mistaken him for his own father. What a little jasmine she was! Almost he weakened into stealing a glance toward the bench where she sat alone awaiting his command. But he saved himself from that public display of unworthy sentiment.

The young clothier, Mr. Furo, passed him hastily and walked down the wharf. His drooping attitude expressed disappointment as he leaned against a pile and stared vacantly across the bay water. What a feeble thing this man must be to go mooning thus before all the world!

The whistle sounded a warning toot. Shimba sprang forward, fearful lest his Chizo-san should be left behind. He saw her little blue kimono fluttering toward him through the throng.

“This way, please!” he was good enough to tell her, and an instant later she was following him—eyes lowered and hands folded, as becomes a respectable wife—up the gangplank and on deck.

He left her in the cabin and went outside to resume his smoking. No one should say that he had violated the code of his people and been found making a fuss over his woman in public. But the vision of her softened his heart for an instant. It had been so long since he had seen a Japanese woman in all the sweetness of her national costume. A picture came to him of a narrow street, steep sloping and with black-lettered banners over the shops. A great number of little creatures, kimonos across their breasts, clogs upon their white-stockinged feet, were passing in and out. A short, stout woman, her hair already a little gray, had just stooped down to take a small boy in her arms. . . .

“Nonsense!” thought Mr. Shimba. He would have his woman in American clothes soon as possible. Already he

had arranged that a fashionable shirtwaist, skirt and shoes should be waiting her at the hotel; also a hat with a stylish red ribbon. All the people should know that the Shimba family were as up to date as anybody!

The lonely Furo passed him as he stood against the rail. He paused an instant, raised his eyes and smiled inscrutably.

"Are the arrangements delayed again, Furo-san?" asked Mr. Shimba, determined not to be too severe with this weakling.

"Until to-morrow," replied Furo, sipping through his teeth and bobbing. "It is always to-morrow, Shimba-san."

Furo passed on again and continued to smoke in solitude, while Shimba considered the man's case all the way across to the San Francisco side. The fellow should be pitied, after all. With women harder and harder to get, what would Furo do in case his wife was shipped back to Japan?

At Pier Five Shimba carried Chizo-san's baggage for her and permitted her to follow meekly through the crush of drays among the open warehouses.

A fog-voiced truckman bawled, "Pipe the Jap an' his chicken!" as they passed, but Shimba never looked round until they had come to a smart line of hotel busses on the cobbled water front.

"Private car, Mr. Shimba?" asked an enterprising yellow chauffeur, stepping beyond the dead line. "Price of one dorrar to Hotel Meiji."

Regardless of extravagance, Shimba permitted his bride to step after him into the luxuriously padded tonneau. The car headed recklessly up Market Street, and Chizo-san peeped shyly up at the great buildings, then lowered her eyes again as though a square look at them would cause the monsters of brick and concrete to come tumbling about her head. Beyond her first words at the immigrant station she had not opened her lips to her new husband.

"How do you like riding in this fine car, Chizo-san?" he asked her, deeming it not unseemly to talk with her, now that they were alone.

"Ah!" she exclaimed politely, passing her tiny fingers over the second-rate upholstery. "It is remarkably rich."

She turned her eyes and peeped up at his face.

"You don't ride in such fine carriages in Japan, do you?" he smiled triumphantly.

"Only the nobles and the *narikin* can afford to ride so."

She was sorry to have used the last offensive noun. Possibly Mr. Shimba was a *narikin*, which is the word to describe the vulgar war profiteers and noisy new rich, who have sprung up like mushrooms in Japan.

"One must have more than five sen a day to live in this country," he explained proudly. "Here we have chicken almost every week, as though it were the Emperor's birthday."

"Are these members of the nobility?" asked the picture bride, now openly gaping at the throng passing up and down Market Street.

Shimba laughed.

"You are very green," he said.

"I am nothing in your sight," admitted Chizo-san. "But behold so many ladies wearing shirt waists and skirts and tight black sandals with a high peg under the heel! In Nippon only the daughters of great officials appear thus at state ceremonies."

"Have you never seen these long-haired people in motion pictures?" asked Shimba with patronizing indulgence.

"Oh, yes! And the ladies of the Rice Country all dress like this, do they not? In one motion picture I beheld the female family of the Honorable Oo Shi (Woodrow Wilson) and they displayed these ceremonial shirt waists."

"You, too, shall go forth like this," he promised her.

"I, unworthy to do so?"

"You shall see, Chizo-san."

His protruding teeth showed broadly in a grin at this last promise, which was made good almost as soon as they had taken their room at the Hotel Meiji. Boxes and bundles of various sizes lay across the ornamental brass bed.

"Open them," commanded the husband.

Chizo-san's fingers went prying under the paper wrappings, and when the lid of the largest box had fallen away she stood back, uttering a birdlike note of admiration. Finally she took courage and brought out an elaborately pleated plaid skirt, which she unfolded reverentially and displayed at arm's length. She was holding it upside down.

Not even at her wedding dinner which the Shimba and Nohmi families had held in February—the bridegroom being absent—had there been such a lavish display of food as was spread before the newly united couple in a back room of the Hotel Meiji. Chizo-san ate little, because the sickness of the sea was still upon her, and she was afraid of this strange man who was to claim her forevermore.

Shimba, however, was in splendid appetite. His chopsticks roved busily from dish to dish on the square tray before him. Chopped chicken, raw fish, bean curd, seaweed, egg noodles, pickled radishes he plucked skillfully between the two sticks which he held pincers fashion. He raised his soup bowl constantly, making the sibilant noise which politeness demanded, and before the meal was over he had finished six bowls of rice.

Now and then he would cast a proprietorial eye upon the lady whom he had equipped regardless of expense in the latest American style. Her shirt waist alone had cost him four dollars, and he was proud that she had not put it on—as he had feared she might—hind side before.

The meal at last completed, Shimba sipped a bowl of tea,

which was thin green in color like melted jade. He deigned to smile again.

"The boat for Walnut Grove leaves at half past six," he informed her. "Till then let us enjoy what Americans call the moon of the honey. Come! We shall go together to the great theater of the town, there to behold Pickford O-Mary-san, famous among the long-hairs for her remarkable art."

"Shall we sit together, Honorable One?" asked his wife in her birdlike voice.

"I shall permit it," he said.

Chizo-san waddled submissively in his wake toward the street car. She was obsessed by a fear that her fashionable skirt would fall off—it trailed in the rear as she walked. Her American shoes hurt her dreadfully, and she had an instinct to hold them on with her toes, as she had learned to do with her sandals. Her hat with the red ribbon bobbed first this way and then that, betraying a racial prejudice to her high-built pompadour. Chizo-san was very miserable for a while, yet wonder overcame her as they entered the dark temple of many seats, where a big organ squeaked and roared while gigantic figures, some of them in clothing like that she now wore, anticked, wept, battled, loved without shame on a great white cloth stretched across the proscenium.

Chizo-san stood in the aisle, palsied with fright.

"Sit here," commanded her lord.

"Aye, Most Honorable!" she whispered, and huddled beside him.

v

They arrived next day at Bly, having driven from Walnut Grove in a hired car. Many of the sun-born people, clad strangely in the costume of the long-haired ones, greeted them as they passed. They rattled in through the white gate past rows of ripening fruit until they stopped

at last by a collection of shedlike, low-browed huts. A man in a rough American shirt and muddy boots came smiling forward to remove his wide straw hat.

"This is Matsu-san, my partner," explained Shimba in the voice of ceremony.

Chizo bobbed and Matsu bobbed.

A squat woman in an enormous sunbonnet came waddling out of the hut.

"And Mrs. Matsu, my partner's wife."

Mrs. Matsu and Mrs. Shimba bobbed.

Obediently Chizo-san followed her lord into the house. The dirt floor was littered with domestic rubbish. On the sleeping platform in the room beyond more rubbish had been piled. Here was none of the exquisite neatness, the humble beauty of the little home she had left across the waters.

And yet Shimba's family in Japan had told her much of their son's prosperity. She had learned to think of America as a place of freedom and much wealth. Chizo-san stood dazed and looked blankly at the seared old features of the man she had come so far to meet.

"Do you live here, Honorable?" she at last found voice to inquire.

"Where else?" he asked her roughly.

She stood immovable, her face a stolid mask.

"You will find work clothes in yonder trunk," said her husband. "We have wasted a great deal of time this week. When you have changed your clothes come out and I will show you what to do."

She remained immovable, stupidly staring at the floor.

"You are expected to be industrious," he informed her. "Remember, you did not come to America to lead the life of a geisha."

CHAPTER XVI: DUNC MAKES A BET

i

IT was a morning in late summer, and the drying north wind had been blowing its fiery breath across the valley until fields and vineyards seemed to smoke on the verge of conflagration. In that oven breath grapes withered before they ripened on the vine, though the harvest season had already come to some of the ranches. Only yesterday Anna had been driven by Henry Johnson as far as Lodi, where the hot fields were populous with workers gathering heavy clusters of the amethystine globes.

The world which had blossomed so invitingly for Anna upon the day of her arrival had grown sere with the progress of the crop. Branches were borne down with brilliant blue fruit, but dust lay heavy on the boughs or flew away in brown clouds to gather in brown shapes and disappear among the foothills. The river banks had lost their fresh color; their foreheads, topped with seeding grasses, blew silvery as though old age had come upon a savage god while he lay asleep in the sun.

Anna Bly, as she came to her veranda and looked through the dry leaves, had changed a little too. Life out of doors had tinted her cheeks a soft brown. She had not grown bent with toil, as Tazumi had predicted, but her figure was slimmer than it had been since girlhood. As she stood there in her simple muslin gown, the mass of her dark hair artlessly coiled, she showed the influence of her season in a new environment. The mark of sorrow had faded from her face, but something else had come there—something more disturbing. The mouth which she had schooled so long to utter no complaint had become a little

wistful, and her clear gray eyes roved over the orchards with a look that suggested both worry and unrest.

Up the path from the Japanese camp she saw Shimba, the farmer, shuffling toward the porch. He held something between his open palms, and his whole attitude was like that of a pilgrim bringing offerings to a shrine.

"What have you got there, Shimba?" asked Anna from her height.

"Prune!" he giggled, and revealed a double handful of small blue plums, which he laid on the steps and smiled his toothful benediction.

"Pretty soon those prune will be finish," he announced, proud as though he had had a share in the ripening process.

"These are ready to dry now, aren't they?" she asked, seating herself on the upper step and examining the pretty fruit.

Shimba laughed at her joke.

"When they jump off tree then prune make ripe," he explained.

"How soon will the jumping begin?" she asked.

"Two week come plenty. Maybe rain drop first. That make crop all spoilt."

"No fear of rain now," said Anna cheerfully.

"Somebody can't tell," he gloomed.

Two weeks! Anna's eyes grew dreamy with the thought of harvest time, that last dramatic act in the farmer's year.

"Think of it!" she cried. "I hope you've arranged for pickers. They say that labor's dreadfully scarce."

Shimba giggled again.

"I got plenty good boy long time," he informed her.

"You think of everything, Shimba," she complimented him.

His face was perfectly solemn, his eyes as hard as agate as he replied, "I think sufficient."

He picked up one of the ripening prunes and turned it over in his horny palm.

"Japanese boy from Santa Crara catch fourteen cen' a poun', best grade prune," he grunted. "We catch twerve cen'."

"What's the matter with our prunes?" she asked, though what he told her had ceased to be news.

"Too good. That 'mission merchant make contract by me last year—two year prunes fo' twerve cen'."

"We'll lose on that," she sighed.

"Farmer all time lose," he told her, smiling at the disagreeable announcement.

He was turning away when she stopped him with a question which she seldom asked, since it was her policy to interfere as little as possible.

"How's your wife, Shimba?"

"Oh, she very nice."

"Is she beginning to like America?"

"All Japanese lady like him," he declared, weaving from foot to foot as if anxious to go.

"Isn't she ever lonesome?"

"Oh, no! She have too nice time!" he smiled, and made his escape among the trees.

ii

Since the late spring day when Shimba had come rolling back with his picture bride Anna had watched the strange match with considerable curiosity. She had peeped at the little thing getting out of the automobile in her preposterous clothes; and remembering the terrifying end of the late Mrs. Shimba, she had felt a surge of pity for the young creature who had come into these new surroundings to stare blankly like a frightened animal.

A day later she had scarcely recognized the girl as she appeared in the fields, hoeing round an irrigation ditch, her body bent, her head obliterated under the flaps of an enormous sunbonnet. On several occasions she had tried to

talk to Chizo-san, but Matsu or Shimba or Mrs. Matsu had always been hovering about.

Henry Johnson, exercising his prerogative as white and yellow man in one, had come to Anna with gossip of the fields. He had hinted that Mr. Shimba was not doing very well with his latest matrimonial venture. Young Mrs. Shimba had notions in her head. She had discarded the traditional obedience of her race, and talked among the neighborhood women.

One day Anna had found the little bride alone in a corner of the orchard. She was leaning very sadly on the handle of her hoe. Her sunbonnet had dropped to her shoulders, revealing a bowed, pathetic head.

"You speak English?" Anna had asked, approaching the discouraged figure.

The picture bride raised her eyes, and Anna could see that she had been crying. Until then she had not known that a Japanese woman could weep.

"Plenty," chirped the bird. "I learn him by high school."

"Are you happy here, Chizo-san?"

"I—no—happy," she had replied, pausing on every word.

"Is your husband good to you?"

"Yiss. He too good."

"What's the matter, Chizo-san?"

"I—no—could—un-stand—everything."

"Do you want to go back to Japan?"

"Ah!"

It burst from her in a tiny wail, and she began to cry again.

Anna had taken Chizo-san's trouble to Mrs. Awaga, the yellow pastor's wife. But the good woman had been able to give her but poor satisfaction.

"They are often so," was all Mrs. Awaga could say. "But what can we do?"

She spoke in the same baffled tone she had used when

she had looked across at the Buddhist temple, put there to steal away her husband's congregation.

"Our government has given gentleman's word no more picture brides shall be sent over. I hope in that sincerity! But do not think too much about the new Mrs. Shimba. Our women got married by family arrangement since time commenced. With my husband and me it makes different—perhaps that is why they think us so peculiar."

She had cast a fond glance toward the shabby study where the Reverend Professor Awaga was preparing a sermon.

"But please not worry about Chizo-san. Next time you see her maybe she will be such a good wife."

The little schoolma'am's prediction had proved true. Less than a week later Anna had found Chizo-san alone a second time. She was hoeing her row, her loose sunbonnet flapping with the regular strokes of the tool.

"Good morning, Chizo-san."

The young Mrs. Shimba had looked up, her face a perfect blank, her eyes unfathomable.

"Do you still want to go back home, Chizo-san?" Anna had persisted.

"No—un'stand—Inglis'," the little bride had lisped, and turned again to her hoeing.

Thus ended poor Chizo-san's chapter. Her husband had won.

iii

This torrid summer day which found Anna Bly sitting dreamily beside a handful of ripening fruit had set her thoughts turning—turning in the spell of soul change which had come upon her even as her orchards had felt earth change working forever mysteriously among them.

Something less than two years had passed since her husband's life had been blasted away upon the face of the waters. In her first anguished prayer of widowhood she

had promised that his spirit should be with her always. Yet in spite of that grief and that love she sat to-day struggling to remember his face and his personality. Alas for the narrowness of love! The human heart is too small a thing to accommodate more than one picture at a time.

Dunc Leacy had been at the Brand farm a great deal during the summer, permeating it with his cheerful spirit, taking things in his own hands now and then, for Leacy was fond of having his own way.

To Kipps he was no human being, but a demigod called Dunc. "That's a he-man, mother," had been the boy's announcement after his first view of Leacy. A he-man he was. His wholesome personality seemed to put tonic into the air whenever he came to the Bly farm. For Anna it had been a frank and happy companionship, with no trace of sentimentality. So far as she could see, he was just about as attentive to Zudie as to her.

Had he come in some day to announce his engagement to her sister Anna would have felt no pang of jealousy. At least so she told herself—and telling, she lied. She had never confessed to her heart the need which any normal young woman, alone and mateless in the world, has always with her.

She sat on the top step steeped in the reveries which crowded closer and closer in her mind with the solitudes of her farm. No. She would be glad if Dunc would marry Zudie. Poor Zudie, she could see, was putting a brave face on everything, yet she was pining for the world she had so impulsively forsaken. Sometimes she flamed up in fits of anger which recalled the wayward moods she had supposedly left in New York. She would rail unreasonably at the land and the climate and the yellow people forever infesting the soil. Fear came to Anna that Zudie was wearing out her enthusiasm.

Something must be done about Zudie. Anna wondered why Dunc Leacy had never thought of marrying. He

seemed enormously popular with women. Too popular, she had heard it hinted here and there. Surely, with his growing prosperity, he could afford to settle down.

Flashing its self-assertive nose among the trees, she saw Dunc Leacy's car approaching at its usual reckless speed. Dunc, the very soul of summer in a linen suit and Panama hat, was driving alone, and his smile was broader than the sun as he came beaming up the steps to greet her.

"Some day!" he chuckled. "And how are prunes?"

"See what Shimba just brought in!" exclaimed Anna, brightening as she always did in his presence.

He turned them over skillfully, squeezed them and tossed them bouncing across the porch.

"Good full fruit," he pronounced. "I shouldn't wonder if you'd make up in prunes for what they bilked you in strawberries, if the rain holds off."

He removed his hat to mop his flaxen pompadour.

"Going to put your fruit through that quaint Noah's ark effect out there?" pointing over his shoulder toward the antique prune gallows.

"Why, yes, Shimba seems to think it will do."

"Well, he's the doctor. It's his loss in labor, that's all."

He lit a cigarette and spoke the question which seemed uppermost in his mind.

"Say, Anna"—they were Anna and Zudie and Dunc to each other now—"has that flathead Helmholtz been round again with a buying proposition?"

"He was here yesterday," she admitted.

"Offering more money?"

"No, he stuck to his original offer. But he urged me to sell right away. He said that another hot wind like this would spoil the crop, and I'd do well to get out before I lost everything."

"Lord!" swore Leacy. "You'd think he was wishing the red spider on your trees! I wonder what's back of all this?"

"Of course he's too good a business man to tell me that."

"Just look here!"

Dunc Leacy brought a shred of newspaper out of his linen coat and indicated a headline.

BIGGER JAP COMBINATION IS PLANNING SCOOP
NATURAL ENERGY FRUIT AND LAND CO. \$15,000,000
CONCERN
BEGINS WHOLESALE GRAB
INDEFATIGABLE K. SATO PRESIDING GENIUS IN SCHEME

As soon as Anna had read the column, written in a vein of race hatred and sensationalism, she handed the paper back to Dunc and smiled.

"Well, they haven't grabbed my land, you see!"

"I've been worrying about you," he confessed.

"About me?"

She scarcely knew it, but her heart fluttered.

"Of course you're going to hang on to this strip—or sell out to a white man," was his next decision.

"Why shouldn't I sell out to anybody I want to?" she asked perversely.

"A few weeks ago," said Dunc slowly, "I couldn't have answered your question. But right now, to-day, I've been forced to a conclusion. A lot of that stuff I've been calling cheap politics and newspaper tommyrot is only too true. The Japanese thirst for land isn't just individual and natural. It's inspired, concerted and directed."

"Inspired, concerted and directed by what?" she persistently smiled.

"The Japanese Government."

"There are Californians who don't think so," she said.

"There are members of the Bohemian Club who never heard of Dan O'Connell," he answered in parable.

"But, Dunc, you can't blame the Japanese Government for K. Sato!"

"All right!" he said. "I'll bet you something that you'll agree with me before it's done with."

"What will you bet?" she teased, determined not to take him in earnest.

"Well, let's see." Good humor was restored to his florid face as he calculated. "Let's see. We'll make the stakes high. Suppose I bet you a carload of asparagus against—"

He paused and reddened a shade.

"Against what?"

"Against a kiss," said Dunc quite shamelessly.

iv

Anna Bly felt her color rising. With all her experience in the wide world she had never been a flirt. The intimate suggestion of Leacy's bet shocked her sense of propriety, and being a normal young woman she liked him at that moment more than she had ever liked him before.

"We'll make it Grade A Eastern grass, spring cutting," he was going on.

When Anna looked round she was surprised to see the earnestness in his clear eyes.

"I never thought you were a gambler," said she, striving to hold her own in the jest.

"I'm a sound investor," declared Leacy. "But if you think the odds are unfair I'll make it two carloads."

She studied him archly. It was often hard to tell when Dunc was fooling. He smiled at this instant, but that same devouring look was in his eyes.

"One carload would be sufficient, I think," she decided.

"Then the bet's on," he insisted, clearing his throat.

What a preposterous idea! Anna felt that she should be angry. Yet there she sat smiling upon the man who crouched beside her, his hands clasped across his tight-kneed knickerbockers. For just a flash their eyes spoke together, then Leacy looked away.

"Anna, I've had you on my mind a lot lately," he said, and her heart leaped again.

"Really?" she managed to say, and was bitterly disappointed in his next remark.

"You're so typical of a certain phase in the California land question."

"Oh!"

"You represent a white spot in a long yellow strip. The yellow is struggling on every side to rush over you and blot you out."

"Aren't you exaggerating a little?" asked Anna.

"I wish I were. We're yellow down on the island too, but the situation there's a little different. We've got the yellow peril working for us, and any time we find enough white labor to do the trick we can clear the Japs and Hindus and Mexicans off the lot and make it a white man's country again. But here the situation is different."

"How—different?"

She eyed him critically, a little coolly, as she always did when his California prejudice began asserting itself.

"You can fight big business with big business," he began. Then with one of his sudden turns, "Why do you suppose Helmholtz is coming round here every week with some new proposition?"

"He's not a Japanese," she pointed out.

"He's a Jap under his skin—just one of those poor specimens willing and anxious to sell out his country on a commission basis. Anna, I don't want you to help him in such a deal!"

"We're sailing very close to the wind," she confessed.

"I'm sorry to hear that, Anna," he replied, his look grave.

"I was ambitious to make the farm nice. It looked so desolate and run down when we came. It didn't seem fair to Zudie—"

"Always Zudie!" Dunc's low tone broke in.

"I had the house repaired and painted. We got nearly all the furniture new. Then Shimba insisted on new pumping machinery for the irrigation system, and I had the barns rebuilt. We had to have a car and a garage for it. Then

the fruit bins were in frightful shape—all these improvements cost a great deal of money."

"At the present Klondike prices—I should say yes!"

"So you see," she added wistfully, "the prune crop's just got to pay."

"You ought to tell that to the prunes," he laughed, but was serious in an instant. "I'm glad you've built to stay, Anna. You've shown a lot of nerve to come here and fight it out—green as you were. Lordy, I wish I were your boss."

"What would you do?" she asked, her voice softening.

"I'd just see that you stuck it out."

"I'm going to stick it out!" she declared.

"I don't know," said Dunc, studying her curiously. "It's a pretty thing, the song of Asia. You don't know the Japs as I know them. In fact I've been operating here for a good many years, and it hasn't been until this summer that I began to open my eyes."

"What's turned you?" she asked.

"The Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company," he replied, and lifted a corner of the newspaper scrap out of his pocket.

She was about to question him more closely, but the deepening of his eyes held her to another thought.

"Anna," he began awkwardly, "I've got my life in a sort of queer mix-up."

At that instant Anna's sedan came puffing into view, Zudie looking cool and pretty in a rear seat, while Henry Johnson, every inch a philosopher, tugged thoughtfully at the wheel.

"Hello, Henry!" cried Dunc Leacy as he came down to help Zudie with her bundles.

"Ah, Mr. Leacy!" Henry had got out and stood bowing ceremoniously, his seedy hat almost sweeping the road dust. "Your appearance always adds freshness to the weather."

"Fresh describes it!" laughed Zudie, giving him a slender

hand. "And speaking of freshness, have you noticed the wind?"

Dunc Leacy wet his forefinger and held it appraisingly on high.

"Whoops!" he cried. "It's coming from the south! Hot wave's busted! Now if it doesn't turn to rain——"

"There's always an If for the poor farmer!"

"It's at least a thousand degrees cooler," declared Zudie. "Have you been chloroformed or something that you haven't noticed it?"

Anna cast a conscious look toward the man who had come closer to her in these few minutes than ever before in their happy acquaintanceship. No, she hadn't noticed the weather.

"Any mail?" she asked as soon as her sister had stepped under the shadow of the porch.

"A communication from the Mikado, I think," smiled Zudie, bringing forth a large, square envelope, embossed with a flowery seal.

"It's Baron Tazumi!" cried Anna delightedly when she had examined the formal card. "He's in San Francisco, and we're invited to a party."

"Oh, goody!" exclaimed her sister, and plucked the invitation from Anna's hand, then read disjointedly: "Dinner and reception—St. Francis Hotel—honor of distinguished travelers returning from Japan—why, it's next Thursday!"

"How very nice of the baron!" beamed Anna.

"Oh, he'll not forget us!" Zudie assured her. "And we're going, aren't we?"

"We must," Anna decided.

"I'm just dying for a party. Isn't he an old dear?"

v

When Zudie had gone into the house Dunc Leacy stood stiffly against a pillar of the porch and hesitated as one groping for words whereby to speak his mind.

"It's none of my business," he began gruffly, "but I'd like to know——"

Anna's heart seemed to harden at his tone. The psychological atmosphere had changed as suddenly as the weather.

"What would you like to know?" she asked.

"Are you really going to that Jap's party?"

"Baron Tazumi is an old friend of the family," she informed him, "and we are most certainly going."

"I told you it was none of my business," he said with a twisted smile.

"What objection can you possibly have?" she asked. "Some of the most distinguished people in America will be there."

"Some of the most distinguished people are often wrong," he smiled again. "That's what makes politics, I suppose."

"As the representative of a great government, hasn't he the right to entertain whom he pleases?" she insisted, striving to keep anger out of her voice.

"Is he entertaining as a representative?"

"Isn't he?"

"After the pretty lecture I've just been giving you!" Dunc Leacy shook his head. "And here we are again—just where we started."

"I don't understand your terms," she told him.

"I'm sorry," said he very gently. "Well, it's time I was going back to the grass country."

He was gone ten minutes when Zudie came back to the porch and found her sister standing, her unseeing eyes gazing into the orchards.

"Anna, you haven't quarreled, have you?" asked the little sister.

Anna Bly struggled with herself before she could reply.

"How could any one be so bigoted?"

"He's perfectly wild about you, Anna," replied the girl, who was sometimes as wise as she was frivolous.

CHAPTER XVII: A TALK WITH THE ADMIRAL

i

THEY loitered for several days in San Francisco, because, as Zudie expressed it, "Prunes won't be ripe for two weeks, and nobody can steal our trees while we're away."

It was a week of social gayety in the city of beautiful breakneck streets and energizing fogs. The Pacific fleet had just steamed into port from the south, and visiting jackies brought in a new note of color to the town which prohibition itself cannot make quite sad. From the hilly cobbles of Sutro Baths to the flat-lying cobbles of the water front rolled handsome specimens of the genus gob, and for every gob at least one pretty girl.

On such a week the male civilian must needs stand aside or fight it out cave-man fashion at the end of ten bare knuckles. One alternative proved as vain as the other. Naval policemen, clubs at their belts and frowns upon their brows, stood before every corner drug store. Warrant officers, machinists' helpers, able seamen, bo's'n's mates spilled out of taxicabs and rubberneck wagons; or they clung to the jaunting-car seats of the Union Street cable car in its miraculous climb over the Alpine streets of Russian Hill.

That nobody ever fell to his death was but another tribute to the clinging powers of the trained sailorman. There was always a slender waist by which to anchor. "Pinafore" was in the breezy air, and for Little Buttercup it was the day of days.

It was Wednesday when the Brand sisters came to San

Francisco, and they found the Palace Hotel lobby gay with officers, several of whom they recognized as friends of New York and Washington days. The chubby junior lieutenant who came rushing over to greet them proved to be Bobby Burns of pleasant memory.

"Of course you're coming to the reception on board ship," he exclaimed.

"We're not invited, thank you," laughed Zudie.

"We've been living so out of the world we forgot there was such a thing as a Navy," was the way Anna explained it.

"Well, when the Old Man learns you're in town he'll send a destroyer right up Market Street to haul you in," Bobby threatened.

"We shan't run away!" Zudie promised him, and Anna asked, "How is the Admiral?"

"Fit as a fiddle and wishing he was dead. The Old Man isn't much of a tea-going sailor, you know. He'd rather fight twenty grand fleets than one dinner party—and he's booked up to the limit. Official dinner to-night, board-of-trade luncheon to-morrow and that big Jap blowout in the evening."

"You mean Baron Tazumi's dinner?"

"Yes. He seems to be spending money like a lucky tout."

"We're going!" announced Zudie.

"Bully! I'm glad there'll be somebody to talk to. And say, the Old Man's going to be sore as a crab when he finds you're in town and haven't come aboard! Just let me tip him off, will you?"

How well Lieutenant Burns tipped him off was demonstrated within the hour, when an aid presented Admiral Bledsoe's compliments over the telephone and begged that Mrs. Bly and Miss Brand attend the reception on the flagship as the Admiral's guests.

"I knew we were going to have a regular orgy!" cried

Zudie, and Anna was happy to see the merriment returning to her little sister's eyes.

That afternoon when they stooped under the launch's tasseled canopy to put foot on the floating platform beside the great steel hull a band on the deck above was playing an intoxicating waltz. Even as she mounted the ladder up the side Zudie's little feet were keeping time, hungry for the element in which they had flourished. Anna's heart was fluttering with the enchantment. Not until now had she realized how much she had missed the gayeties of her former life.

And how glad she was for Zudie! Always Zudie, as Dunc Leacy had said upon their last interview.

Several gold-braided officers came forward to greet them, and Anna recognized many of Alec's mates at Annapolis, men who had shared their rooms with him and sailed with him on the great adventure from which he never returned.

"Hello, Anna!" sang out a half dozen cheerful voices in which she recognized the intonations of old friends.

"How in the world did you ever get into this harbor?" besought Lieutenant Gregg, a bearlike officer who had served with Alec.

"We don't live here," chimed in Zudie. "We're over near Sacramento running a farm."

"A farm!" Many pleasant voices took up the humorous refrain.

"Well, you've grown one peach on it, I'll say!" sang out Bobby Burns, who for long had claimed a place among Zudie's admirers. "Have you followed the plow so long you've forgotten how to dance?"

"I don't know," she retorted. "Let's find out."

The bearlike Gregg claimed Anna before a number of rivals. To the accorded sound of silver cornets, played

with a swagger peculiar to naval bands, they whirled across the canvas-covered deck under the wide canopy which shaded batteries of giant guns. The flags of all the Allies, stretched end-to-end round the rail, gave a checkered brilliancy to the improvised pavilion.

When the dance was over Anna and her partner stood beside a gallant little banner whereon a rising sun shot scarlet rays across a snow-white field.

"The Japanese flag!" said Anna. "It's the most aesthetic of them all."

"But not the most beautiful," replied Gregg, and his eyes were then upon the level stripes of Old Glory.

"I don't see why you naval men should always be putting the two flags in rivalry!" she exclaimed.

"Rivalry?" asked Gregg, and laughed a big thick laugh. "There's no naval rivalry between America and Japan."

"No? Then what's all this war talk?"

"The European row is over. The newspapers have got to rant about something. The Japanese aren't madmen, you know, whatever you want to say against them."

"You mean they're afraid of our Navy?"

"They're sane, that's all. Do you see those little bean shooters up there?"

His glance indicated the long, sheer barrels of heavy guns pointing from their turrets.

"Anna, we've got four ships right here in this harbor that could outrange and outfight the entire Japanese navy."

"So we'll be going round the world like armed bullies from shore to shore!" exclaimed Anna.

"Joking?" smiled Gregg.

"I suppose so. It's hard to say. At any rate I'm awfully happy to see the uniform again."

"And don't suppose that we're going round like bullies from shore to shore?" he persistently grinned.

"My remark was in horrid taste," she confessed.

"Because you're one of our crowd, Anna," said the good-

natured friend. "And I'd hate to think that life on the farm had turned you into a Bryanite."

Anna heard no more of this, though Lieutenant Gregg was rated a good talker among sailors. But all during the conversation her eyes had been seeking out Zudie, and when at last she discovered her little sister the sight was sufficiently astonishing to drive every other idea out of her head.

In and out among the dancers wove the supple figure, the very picture of grace in rhythm. Her eyes were brighter than Anna had ever seen them before, her cheeks were flaming like peonies. Anna could see all this in the instant when Zudie was turned toward her. The next instant Anna caught sight of the girl's partner.

Lieutenant Commander Sidney Footridge!

"I'm so glad!" thought Anna, and could have cried for joy, but to Lieutenant Gregg she said, "Why, there's Sid Footridge!"

"He joined us with the destroyers at San Diego," explained Gregg. "It's not for long, between you and me."

"Has he been ordered away?"

"To the Philippines," explained her informant. "And gosh, how he does dread it!"

Anna danced away with little Bobby Burns, who managed a fox trot well in spite of his inferior stature.

"This is the life!" he chuckled in her ear.

"Indeed it is, Bobby!" she agreed; but he little knew how much of her heart went out in the words.

In spite of the athletic requirements of the dance, her eyes were always seeking after Zudie, and her thoughts went with her gaze. Footridge continued to claim her, dance after dance. Anna uttered a prayer of thanksgiving, even to the accompaniment of profane music. While Anna was dancing an encore she saw the reunited couple leaning against the rail.

"What is there worth quarreling about?" thought Anna.

"Is anything sufficiently important to part young lovers at the time when they should be mated?"

Then her mind wandered to thoughts of her own poor case. The day was in sight when she would be thirty years old.

"For one of my advanced years," laughed Anna as she completed her third dance with Bobby, "these modern dances are a bit trying."

"You toddling infant!" whinnied Burns, applying a handkerchief to his brow.

"What's happened to the Admiral?" she asked. "I haven't had a peep at him—his own reception too. He ought to be ashamed of himself."

"He's down below," chuckled Bobby, "fighting off a delegation of lady highbrows who want him to hold the fleet another week so that they can give him a few more banquets. He's on a diet, you know, and the thought of a ten-course dinner makes him perfectly savage."

"Poor old Uncle Len!" sighed Anna, harking back to her childhood name for the great man.

At that instant she saw Zudie and Sid Footridge coming toward them. His face seemed to give forth rays of light; and the peonies were still blooming on Zudie's cheeks.

"Well, Sid," said Anna as her hand was crushed in his big palm, "we meet again, after all!"

"With a brass band," roared Sid, "and all flags flying! Zudie's been trying to make me believe that you actually grow prunes on your farm."

"We do grow several," admitted Anna, always willing to joke about the comic fruit.

"How many?"

"My Japanese brought me nearly a plateful of ripe ones last Saturday."

"They call it Little Japan out there," explained Bobby in a voice which hinted that the Brand sisters were on exhibition.

"How do you like the Japs by this time?" asked Sid Footridge.

Anna hoped that they wouldn't quarrel again when Zudie cut in: "They're simply lovely. I don't know how we'd get anything done without the Japanese. Isn't that so, Anna?"

"They're very capable," Anna agreed faintly, and was saved from further parley by a booming series of explosions coming in a rapid succession, "Well, well, well!" from the stairway below.

iii

Two muscular arms, blue clad and gold braided, went round the slim shoulders of the Brand sisters, pulling them together into a family group, as the deep-lined, aquiline, merry-eyed face of Admiral Bledsoe beamed down on them.

"Well, well, well! What are you two children doing so far away from home? By George, Zudie, you're a regular grown-up lady, aren't you? And, my word, Anna's in long dresses too. Either I'm getting old or girls are going out into society younger than they used to."

Uncle Len always spoke of Anna as a *débutante*, and seemed quite unable to realize that she had matured into a woman.

Like the merry monarch that he was, he insisted that the sisters should come below "and help talk some of this tea gabble out of my head," as he put it. The group of officers gathered round grinned appreciatively at the Old Man's joke, but Sid Footridge looked a trifle crestfallen, Anna thought, as they deserted him at the head of the stairs.

On the way down a plutocratic Californian stopped the Admiral to introduce his plutocratic wife. A great land-owner of the rainbow-painting type was this Californian. He urged the Admiral to hitch his ship indefinitely on the shore of God's country. He desired the Admiral to ride

in the fastest and biggest motor car that money could buy, to enjoy the hospitality of the finest country place in Mill Valley, to behold the finest stock farm, the finest forest land, the noblest view in America, all of these desirable things being the sole possession of the great California landholder.

The Admiral was sorry, but he had a pressing engagement to conduct the Pacific fleet into deep waters within a very few weeks.

As soon as he had guided his favorite children to the semicircular steel-riveted room below he permitted his seamy face to crinkle into a smile.

"Patrolling the North Sea isn't the hardest job I've ever tackled," said he, showing his guests to stationary chairs and punching a button to order tea and cigarettes.

Anna's eyes roved curiously round the walls, regarding autographed photographs of all the earth's royalties still in respectable standing. King George and Queen Mary, their Majesties of Belgium and of Italy, Ferdinand of Rumania had expressed in several languages their regard for the popular Admiral. President Poincaré's grizzled beard and gentle features offered a tribute from democracy to democracy. The Emperor and Empress of Japan beamed benignly from prominent places on the wall.

The sight of all these sovereign lords of universal understanding, gathered as though in peaceful conference in one of America's greatest war vessels, had a soothing effect on Anna's nerves. War at least, thought she, had exerted this beneficent influence, had made it possible for the mightiest peoples of the earth to meet upon a basis of good will.

But the Admiral talked of home things with all the affectionate curiosity of a father who had been long separated from his own. Were they doing well on their farm? Did they like the life? Did they get along smoothly with the Japanese? The Old Man fancied that there had been a lot of loose talking on the Japanese subject lately. No

loose talking for him, you bet! Too many admirals had been going in for oratory since the war.

The Old Man winked and crackled his seamy face again at this last sly hint. And when Anna intimated that she had heard a naval officer say that four ships now in San Francisco harbor could outfight and outrange the Japanese navy he tightened his lips and spluttered: "Pshaw! Japan's not on our target range. Get that out of your heads!"

As soon as tea was over he bounced to his feet.

"Come on, children," he said. "I want to show you some bits of hardware I've picked up during my travels. Sailors are always collecting trinkets, you know. First of all, I want to show you my Jug."

He winked again. Leading them into the officers' mess he stopped before a sideboard and pointed out his Jug. It was a beautiful silver urn, standing three feet from lip to pedestal. It bore Great Britain's coat-of-arms and up and down its silvery bowl many world-famous names were engraved below the inscription: "From the officers of the Grand Fleet to Leonard Bledsoe."

"I guess I'll have to keep that in the family," declared Uncle Len, patting his Jug affectionately. "And come along. Take a look at my collection of badges."

He opened a chest of drawers in the semicircular room and brought out a number of small boxes, some of lacquer, some of velvet.

"That's a pretty one, isn't it?" he smiled deprecatingly, opening the first box to reveal an elaborate decoration of gold and enamel suspended from a ribbon.

"The Order of the Bath!" exclaimed Zudie.

"Oh, yes, so it is," agreed the Admiral. "And this one's the Order of King Leopold. And this is the Order of Savoy, isn't it?"

He gazed at the royal favor through his glasses to make sure.

But Anna's attention had been diverted from the

Admiral's discourse. One among the boxes had attracted her from the first; its beautiful lacquer surface, adorned with a golden chrysanthemum, had urged her to raise the lid and look at the treasure inside. Finally she obeyed the impulse.

A perfect example of the goldsmith's art lay before her on its bed of flowery brocade. Sun rays of white enamel, alternated with streamers of gold, shot forth from a center which might have been a flat-cut ruby or a marvelous circle of brilliant red enamel.

"This is the flower of your collection!" she cried, holding the mighty trifle up to the light.

"You think so?" asked the Old Man.

"It's so simple and so—so imperial!"

"Order of the Rising Sun," explained he. "Nice thing. The Mikado sent that round to me one day."

And he closed the box as if to guard himself against any undue display of pride.

CHAPTER XVIII: THE VERY NOBLE GENTLEMAN

i

IT was while Baron Tazumi was receiving his guests in the reception room outside the banquet hall that Anna had her first glimpse of him during her visit to San Francisco. With the ribbon of a foreign order across his shirt front and the correct smile on his lips, he looked—as he always did—the man of the world, always charming, never at a loss for words.

But he seemed a little older, she thought, than when she had last seen him in New York. His face was still un-wrinkled and his carefully twisted mustache was black as jet, but his handsome pompadour was salted with gray. As he stood in line, amiably passing his guests on to the American financiers, clergymen and publicists who had so recently enjoyed the hospitality of Japan, his hand at last went out to Anna and Zudie.

“Ah, Mrs. Bly!” he cried, his almond eyes snapping with genuine pleasure. “I was worried for fear my invitation had miscarried. Allow me to present Senator Jascomb, Mr. Ignatius Kohl and the Reverend Doctor Greet. How stupid of me! You have met before.”

Anna was handed on to the important travelers who had been guests of the Cherry Blossom Society in New York and whom she had encountered a little later at the Consul-General’s dinner in San Francisco.

She was of too worldly a breed to feel disappointed at her old friend’s formal greeting. The task of shaking hands with a distinguished multitude, giving each the courtesy of his official rank, was sufficient to keep the baron

busy; therefore she contented herself with Mrs. Jascomb and Mrs. Kohl, who burst almost at once into eulogies of cherry-blossom time in Yeddo and the splendors of the royal court. And they had almost been permitted an audience with the Mikado!

The arrival of officers from the Pacific fleet brightened the scene for Anna and her sister. Rear Admiral Bledsoe, his dress uniform blazing with the loveliest of his "badges"—the Order of the Rising Sun—accepted the hero's meed of flattery and got out of the crush as soon as possible.

He settled himself in a corner with Anna as long as his popularity would permit, and before they could drag him away again he swore: "By hickory, if they'd hand me a pretty one like you once in a while at these dinners you'd never find me aboard ship!"

Out of a corner of her eye Anna could see Sid Footridge talking earnestly with her sister. Hope renewed itself. Her husband's face appeared distinctly for an instant in her brain. Ensign Bly had been so handsome in his new uniform the night they met—and she had wanted him to love her!

Lieutenant Commander Footridge sought her out just as the guests were forming to file into the banquet hall.

"Anna, I ought to have flat feet," he declared. "I land on 'em so often. I just blow in from the bay, expecting to bore myself stiff with some important Jap lady, and here I find a card ordering me to take you in to dinner."

"You perfect dear!" cried Anna, truly delighted. "But you oughtn't to be complaining about the Japanese, Sid. There are only a handful here."

"I'll bet you haven't seen so few at a time since you came to California," he remarked.

"Don't let's start that again, Sid," she begged.

He must have caught her significant look and known that she was thinking of Zudie.

"All right. We'll sit round and gossip while the Inter-

national True Lovers' Festival blows off steam," was the consoling way he put it as they found their places at an obscure end of the U-shaped table. The uniformed, décolleté and white-fronted personages took seats on either side of the noble Japanese. There was a scattering of Tazumi's countrymen—officials, bankers and business men—among the latter the wealthy Mr. Otisuki, who had entertained Anna at Piedmont. At a far end of the table she could see the smiling face of the elegant Mr. Oki, who was making himself agreeable to Zudie, seated at his left.

It was not until game had been served that Sid broached his obsessing topic, which was Zudie.

"Anna, it's the hardest job I ever tackled," he confessed. "After the things she said to me in New York I went away thinking that I'd just quit and stay out of it from then on. I've been batting round from port to port ever since, trying to fix up my life. I almost got myself engaged to a nice girl at Coronado. And now I've come right back to where I started. I can't beat the game, Anna."

"You ought to come over to the farm, Sid," she suggested, hoping that she might help him in some way.

"It's next to impossible to get away now. I've been ordered to the Philippines—I might be sent to sea any day—and this is about my last chance."

"Why don't you ask her now?"

Anna was relying upon the force of simplicity.

"I've done that—again this afternoon," he admitted. "Do you know the condition she tried to tie me up to?"

Anna knew, but she didn't say so.

"She wants me to quit the Navy."

His further lament was interrupted by a toast to the President of the United States, for dinner had by now reached a point where something that popped like cham-

pagne and tasted like soda water had been poured from tin-foiled bottles into tall glasses. When this was over and the health of the Emperor of Japan had been proposed by Senator Jascomb, and the guests had got up and sat down several times, and Baron Tazumi had toasted the distinguished tourists and the distinguished tourists had toasted Baron Tazumi, the speech making began in earnest.

Smiling modestly across the table, the baron explained that since this was no formal dinner, but—in a manner of speaking—a family gathering, he found himself in the position of toastmaster and host in one. If there were any present narrow enough to doubt the good relations between America and Japan, let him listen to the words of these representative Americans who had just returned from the islands of Nippon, where they had studied both the faults and the virtues of these people whom a yellow press is disposed to call a yellow peril. Tazumi's manner was modest in the extreme, and he closed his remarks with the deprecating hope that the speakers wouldn't be too hard on his little people.

Anna noted in the speeches that followed something of the tone she had heard at the Cherry Blossom Society dinner. But the song had become strangely more melodious. Senator Jascomb, early among the singers, declared that the average Japanese enjoyed a personal freedom comparable to that of the average American.

“Despotism though it may be,” he vociferated, “you will find few instances of social injustice or the cruelty of class against class. Half starved for land—yes. Inured to lives of grinding economy—yes. But exploited by capitalism—never!”

“Personally conducted!” whispered Footridge. “I'll bet they never let him get within smelling distance of one of their factories.”

After the illustrious Mr. Kohl had expounded upon the superior trade relations of the little people among the in-

ferior nations of Asia, the Reverend Doctor Greet was called upon.

His beautiful, sensitive face, crowned with flowing silver, shed a benediction across the room as he spoke at length upon the subject of Japanese morality.

“Where in all the world,” asked his pleasantly emotional voice, “can one find a more beautiful domestic relation than exists among the little workers of Nippon? Each occupying his or her place in the perfectly organized home, the father to labor and to counsel, the mother to labor and to teach, the child to revere the parents, to emulate their honesty and kindness.

“In our Western ignorance we have been brought up to think that the Japanese are a polygamous people. How can we persist in so revolting a libel? The Japanese standard of morality compares more than favorably with the American standard—and I know whereof I speak, because I have devoted years to investigating social conditions in New York and Chicago.”

“And about a week to the same job in Tokyo—personally conducted,” whispered the narrow-minded Footridge.

“We have been brought up to believe,” went on the pleasant-voiced clergyman, “that the prosperous Japanese nobleman is like the Turk of similar station, proprietor of a harem in keeping with his social importance. I see Baron Tazumi smiling at the absurdity of this slander.”

The baron indeed was smiling, and sympathetically the room burst into a titter.

“And I come here to-night, my fellow countrymen, to drive a nail in that popular lie. From the Emperor’s palace down to the lowliest peasant’s hut monogamy is the unbroken rule in Japan to-day. When the present Empress of Japan was a young girl she became a student at the school of Miss Tsuda, a very Christian lady, who so trained the beautiful princess in ideas of Occidental morals that the lesson was never forgotten. The princess later became

engaged to the heir apparent only under condition that concubinage should be forever discouraged in the palace. This noble example had an almost magical effect upon the entire Japanese Empire. Whatever the custom might have been in a generation now relegated to the Dark Ages, in progressive modern Japan there is no double standard of morality as there too often is in America. The marriage tie among the beautiful islands of Nippon is a sacred and lasting thing."

When the applause had died away the Reverend Doctor Greet eulogized the beauty of filial devotion among the sun-born people, and as an example told of a young girl who had sold herself into a Yoshiwara in order to free her parents from debt.

Anna liked this story much less than others the good preacher had to tell. Footridge sat back in his chair, his head tilted toward the ceiling. He was blowing smoke rings.

The speech making, though ardent in the extreme, was of briefer duration than it had been at the Cherry Blossom Society.

"You see," said Sid Footridge, when the diners were rising from the table and the floor was being cleared for dancing, "this is just another case of before and after taking. These Yankee tourists, before going to Japan, were just mildly pro-Jap. They've been under treatment now for a few months—and behold!"

"If you keep on that way, Sid," whispered Anna, "you'll never get Zudie as long as you live."

The naval officer had just opened his mouth to reply when a slender hand was laid on his shoulder.

"What have you to gain by antagonizing us, Commander Footridge?" asked a sweet voice.

Anna swung nervously round and beheld Baron Tazumi, a good-natured smile on his handsome face, his black eyes snapping quizzically.

"I'm sorry to have butted in, as the American language says it," he continued affably. "But it was innocent eavesdropping, I assure you. And I can't help repeating the question: What have you to gain by antagonizing us?"

"Well, baron," replied Footridge, seeming to come easily out of his first surprise, "are you sure that we are doing the antagonizing?"

"I have an open mind," laughed the baron, "and I am eager to be convinced that Japan has ever been antagonistic."

"You haven't done it by banging a wooden shoe on a dishpan, the way we have," admitted Footridge. "We're a rough lot when it comes to diplomacy. No, Japan hasn't antagonized us that way."

"Just how would you say?" smiled the great gentleman.

"By kind words and soft answers," replied Footridge.

"I should like to discuss that with you in a friendly spirit," invited Tazumi, and Anna could not choose but admire his continued good nature. Or was it the kindness of a wise teacher, conscious of his superior intelligence, yet too expert to show superiority?

"We'll go fifty-fifty on the hall," grinned Footridge, his eyes wandering toward a corner where Zudie stood surrounded.

"Ah!"—the baron's eyes danced—"but it should be in a neutral country."

"There's always Coblenz," suggested the lieutenant commander. "And now if you'll pardon me——"

He made his bow and was off to fight for his share of Zudie's attention.

"A fine fellow!" exclaimed Tazumi. "A splendid type of

service man. His father, as I knew him, was like that—stubborn and brusque and a little—shall I say it?—provincial."

Like all his countrymen, Tazumi was shy about dancing. Possibly it was a consciousness of his inferior stature; possibly it was a hereditary prejudice against public familiarity between male and female. At any rate he expressed, without saying so, his preference to sit the dance out. They found themselves a little gilt alcove outside the big room. Here they settled among rose upholsteries, pleasantly distant from the fine wail of violin strings. She knew instinctively what Tazumi was about to say, and as he talked on, obviously playing for time, she made a rapid review of her life and his place in it.

He was, she still persisted, the finest gentleman she had ever met. In stature, to be sure, he was short. Then came to her an echo from the speech she had heard in a Buddhist temple: "Nobody shall say that our souls are smaller than theirs." Surely Tazumi's soul was a great one. Trained in the narrow creed of an old nobility, he had schooled his fine mind to open to all the world, to comprehend the message of a universal brotherhood. What could be higher than that?

His skin, to be sure, was a shade sallower than hers, his eyes a little different. Many women of her acquaintance had married hideously ugly men and loved them to distraction. What then was the invisible wall between her and the aristocratic Tazumi?

In that searching flash she thought of Dunc Leacy—or was it the mind behind the mind that brought his picture to her? There had been an hour when she had considered him. That hour had passed.

"Anna"—she heard Tazumi's high-pitched voice coming out of the general to the particular—"I have often wondered. How tall are you?"

"I?" She laughed a trifle nervously. "I'm a bean pole—five feet ten."

"Ah!" His tone was rich with admiration. "And we are such little people!"

"Not in spirit," she told him.

"You think not?"

His quick black eyes seemed to devour her, and in another instant he was saying the expected thing.

"Anna, I have thought a great deal about you since we said farewell. It has worried me to think that you might have fallen among those who strive to make trouble between your people and mine. Is it so, Anna?"

"I—I don't think so," she replied.

"You must have known how much I have cared for you," he went on, "though I have never spoken of love."

The last word came strangely from his lips.

"Why should you have thought of me?" she asked ineffectually, groping for something to say.

"There are few American women like you. You are so gentle. You are so inspired with what we call the domestic virtues. I have seen how much you could sacrifice for your children. Such beauties of character are not lost upon a Nipponese."

"Those are admirable qualities to admire," she said, and hoped it hadn't sounded like a sarcasm.

The orchestra was playing tenderly, great waves of sound. Out there on the dancing floor, she remembered, Zudie was swimming in the golden element she loved.

"Much as I have admired your fight against fate," Tazumi was saying, "I have hated to think of you struggling against the rough elements—alone. I am no worshiper of money, Anna, but I have a great deal of it. You would enjoy among my people the place you deserve. You would be a figure in court society. You could live again among the great of the earth."

The great of the earth! Who are they? Big-framed

men, blond and boisterous, fighting for the fruits of the soil with the spirit of boys? Fine-boned yellow men, keen-eyed, studious and thoughtful, planning their destiny with the skill of engineers? Soul strength against soul strength —who are the great of the earth?

Anna glanced at the silk-skinned little man beside her. Candid, earnest, honorable, she knew that he admired her because he, too, was admirable. He had gone into a strange land and fought for his people with an ethical code as pure as Galahad's. And yet she gazed in wonder, trying to imagine them in the relation of husband and wife.

"I shall be called home soon," he urged, "and I should like your answer, Anna."

He touched her hand for an instant, but she withdrew it. His fingers were soft as silk, but cold to the touch.

"Please don't ask me to decide now," she pleaded, rising and looking across the crowded ballroom.

"Many months ago, Anna, I wished to ask this question," he said, standing beside her.

"Everything's so jumbled!"

Anna had herself risen with a panic-stricken desire to run away.

"May I call at your hotel to-morrow at noon?" he asked, coming back to his punctilious manner.

"Oh, yes, do come. I'll try to——"

She rushed away from him to encounter Bobby Burns, cooling off gradually, among the side seats near the orchestra.

"Dance with me, Bobby!" she begged. "I don't care who else claims you."

"You've always got first call," he puffingly assured her. "I'll whirl you until I melt. Great Brussels sprouts, but you look like a handsome, reckless devil, Anna!"

"I am," she agreed, "and I hope the tune never stops!"

Whereupon he clasped her tightly as naval etiquette will permit. He didn't melt, as he had agreed to do for her

sake, but that happy termination was only prevented by a decision of the orchestra leader, who at last laid down his bow and put away his fiddle for the night.

She shook hands with the Baron, among a hundred others, at the door, and thanked him for his entertainment.

iv

In the cloakroom her name came to her from a curious source. A hotel maid, who had just helped Zudie on with her wrap, turned to Anna with the question: "Pardon me, madam. Which of you ladies is Mrs. Bly?"

"I'm Mrs. Bly," said Anna, slightly surprised.

"I have a note for you," explained the woman as she reached to a shelf above the coat hooks and brought down a pinkish square envelope.

The address was astonishing enough. It was written in a large schoolboy hand with every "a" and "o" painfully rounded out:

"Mrs. Bly,
"Care Tazumi Ball,
"Francis Hotel."

"Who brought this?" asked Anna before she had opened the note.

"A Jap boy," said the maid.

"What Jap boy?"

"I can't say, madam. They look so much alike, you know."

Anna concealed the envelope under her cloak, loath to open it before so many prying eyes. It was not until they had reached the outer air and were waiting under the marquee for their taxicab that she harkened to Zudie's suggestion: "It might be something important. You'd better read it right away."

Therefore Anna broke the flap and read:

"Mrs. Bly, you could be there at ten on time because danguras to-morrow A. M. see me about Tazumi and be glad to do so. I am a lady."

Anna had read the queer message over a second time before she found, faintly penciled at the bottom of the page, a name and number—probably an address, though she had never heard of such a street in San Francisco.

When Zudie read the letter she laughed.

"It sounds like one of Shimba's proclamations," was her light decision.

But her look became more serious when she added: "You mustn't think of going, Ann. Heaven only knows what sort of a trap you'd be walking into!"

CHAPTER XIX: ANNA DECIDES

i

NEXT morning Anna rose early, stiff from lack of sleep. During her few hours in bed she had tossed her problems to and fro, struggling with her spirit on the brink of decision. When the morning light, drifting fogily under the window shade, troubled her tired eyes with another day she had reached but one conclusion.

Things couldn't go on as they were. At best she was but an amateur farmer. The crop might prosper, but her brief experience had warned her of the whims of labor and of the gambler's chance which a farmer takes with growing things. She was losing patience with her sister's perversity. Sid Footridge had arrived like a god out of the machine and Zudie was sending him away again. Her own future looked desolate. The farm she had chosen for her children was serving them indifferent well. She could see no satisfactory way of sending Kipps to school again, to be despised by whites and Japanese alike.

Of course if she married Tazumi the children would be thrown with the other race still. But in Japan they would associate with children of their own kind and class. Or she might arrange it with the Baron that Nan and Kipps should be educated in America. No, she couldn't live away from her children—that mustn't be!

Over in her narrow bed, Zudie, her bright hair rilling across the pillow, lay huddled under a coverlid. She always loved to sleep late in the morning. That had been one of the indulgences denied her on the farm. A qualm of pity overcame Anna as she peered at the pretty, luxury-loving

face against the pillow. Zudie was no farm woman. Her life among the trees had been one continual fight against Nature—her own.

Anna rose and tiptoed to the dresser, and the first thing she saw there was the folded square of pinkish paper which had come to her so unaccountably last night at the dance. She went over the quaintly worded sentence until she came to Tazumi's name. It had a sinister look, scrawled there on the silly pink stationery—"10 on time because danguras" had a menacing sound. She glanced closely at the script and decided that the hand was feminine.

She had thrown the note aside the night before, deeming it the idle work of some insane slanderer. But in the depression of cold morning it took on a larger importance. The name of Tazumi fairly shrieked at her from the page. What did she know about him, after all? She still held stoutly to her belief in his unselfishness, but if he had an enemy she should know it.

Anna dressed herself in the bathroom that she might not disturb her sleeping sister. At last she tiptoed in and was putting on her hat before the mirror when Zudie woke sufficiently to drawl, "What are you doing, Ann?"

"Go back to sleep," she said. "I'll not be gone long."

Zudie lay back and resumed her nap. But Anna had just laid her hand on the door knob when her sister sat up in bed, rubbing her eyes.

"Ann, you're not going to do anything about that foolish note!"

"Rubbish!" said Anna, and closed the door against Zudie's supplications.

The taxicab driver did not hesitate over the address she had found scribbled on the pink stationery.

"That's in the Richmond district, lady," he informed her, and sent his car chugging up the heights.

Westward the flying wheels took their course, now over asphalt, now over cobbles. Anna recognized the city hall, but after that she was completely lost. The miles of pretty commonplace houses and apartment buildings of the Richmond district—a city built on empty sand dunes almost over night after the fire and earthquake—meant nothing to Anna Bly.

The scene was pleasing to her eye, accustomed to the heavy sterility of Eastern streets. Flower boxes bloomed under every window; roses climbed over walls as pretty and as flimsy as though they had been built to adorn a stage set. Between the street and the sidewalk there were neat grass plots and flowering shrubs. Along these miles of inexpensive, domestic-minded streets there appeared every variety of architecture from the Spanish mission to Nuremberg rathaus. But one eccentricity prevailed: Every house had its garage, built facing the street, right under the parlor windows. It gave the district a quaint appearance suggesting a town of fire stations. At any instant you might expect any one of those broad doors along the sidewalk to fly open, gongs to sound and gallant fire laddies to dash forth upon the hook and ladder.

It was five minutes after ten when Anna, her taxi having swung into a side street near the Presidio, found the right number among a serried row of domesticated fire stations. It was a very small house, pretty in architecture, with well-tended flower boxes under the nicely curtained windows. At sight of the place Anna lost the misgivings that had haunted her along the way. Nothing sinister could dwell behind those dainty gables and those prettily ruffled curtains.

Scarcely had she raised the small brass knocker when the door opened. It seemed to creep open as though a hand were already upon the inner knob and had turned it even before she came up the steps. She had a glimpse of a pretty foyer paneled in dark wood and of a handsome gray

jar filled with flowers. Against such a background stood the woman who had opened the door. Dazzled by the brilliant outdoor light, Anna's eyes must needs grow accustomed to the dim interior before she recognized the tiny animate figurine with the rosebud mouth and languid Asiatic eyes. Even then there was a momentary puzzlement wherein the caller asked herself, "Where have I seen her before?" Then she remembered—the tiny Korean goddess whom she had seen so carefully guarded in a Market Street department store!

"You come in?" squeaked the lovely miniature, and the knowledge that she was not carved out of ivory or fashioned of porcelain, that she was alive and could talk like other people, brought a certain shock.

"Thank you," replied Anna.

As soon as she was inside, the Korean woman closed the door as softly as she had opened it.

The Ming figurine glided ahead of Anna, a fastidious goddess in a tailor-made skirt and nicely fitted shirt waist. Lithe she was, and agile as a cat; or was she like some spare-bodied Java dancer, trained to gyrate before a temple god with many heads and a belly of brass?

"You sit down?" she invited, gesturing toward a stiff-backed chair.

She did not grin and bob as Japanese women do, but there was a fragile smile upon her dot of a mouth.

"Thank you," said Anna again, and watched the Korean woman perch herself primly in another stiff-backed chair.

The setting was right. Her feet, which could never have touched the floor from where she sat, reposed upon a footstool of red lacquer. Behind her stood a six-paneled Coromandel screen carved with fabulous birds and flowers, delicately tinted. A Chinese rug of an apricot dye, seldom seen even in private collections, stretched across a room, which, though not large, had the look of space, due to its balanced simplicity. There were a few kakemonos on the

flat gray walls, and on the mantel two Chinese jars, graceful and creamy white.

"I am Mrs. Bly. Did you send me a note last night?" asked Anna after a prolonged silence.

"Oh, yes," replied the Korean woman, smiling faintly. "You got him—all right?"

"A maid at the hotel gave it to me."

Anna's curiosity was growing with every sentence.

"I gave one Japanese laundry boy five dollars to do that," explained the Korean. She chirped her words in a precise staccato, much as though she were reciting a lesson. "I did not think he would do it. I so glad."

"Just what was it you wanted to see me about, Miss—?"

"Mees Kim. I am Korean, you un'stand."

"Yes, I know."

"Oh!" Two stiffly graceful hands came together in tiny excitement. "Then you hear about me?"

"I saw you in a department store once. The saleswoman said you were a Korean."

"Yiss."

The slanting eyes closed for an instant, but the dot of a mouth held its faint smile.

"Then you saw," continued Mees Kim, "that Suko-san standing over me like big club? I fool her this morning to see you."

She uttered her first laugh, such a trill as might have issued from a small reed instrument played beside an ancient river in the heart of Asia.

"From ten to eleven," she continued, counting on her fingers, "this Suko-san go fish-marketing. From eleven to one hairdresser come. She very nice people, that hairdresser. She teach me Inglis quite good. She bring me Japanese paper, so that is why I send to you."

"Japanese paper!" echoed Anna, nebulous fears rising in her mind. "What have Japanese papers to do with me?"

"They mention your happiness very often now."

"My happiness?"

"How you shall get married with Baron Tazumi."

Anna sat staring at the little figure in the stiff teakwood chair. What labyrinth of the Orient was she entering now? What trick was this? Why had she been brought here to talk of a groundless rumor in a Japanese paper?

"I wish go to you when I hear that news," Mees Kim was prattling on. "But how could I get away from Sukosan? Then American newspaper tell how you shall be at Tazumi dance. I send for you to-day while Sukosan is away fish-marketing."

"Is there any reason why you shouldn't go where you please?" Anna had so sufficiently recovered to ask.

"Why should I go somewhere? Baron Tazumi would not like that."

Baron Tazumi! Anna's mind went blank again in the new light of understanding.

"Are you married to Tazumi?" she asked softly.

The little Korean's face was now as astonished as her own.

"How could I do that? I am poor family of Korean official. Tazumi very high nobleman."

iii

She still sat straight and proud, but her voice was very humble as she said: "How could he make himself low to me? In his household there should be many ladies. I am honored. Some Korean hate Japanese. But I do not hate Tazumi. He most kind of all men to me. When Japanese soldier men enter Seul and make my father dead, then Tazumi come there so that I should not be hurt. He send me to America to say I was wife of another Japanese. Then he make me in his household."

His household! How much was revealed to her in that expressive word! Anna looked round the magnificently

simple room. How he must have loved her to have surrounded her with such perfection. And here sat the captive creature, daughter of the ancient East, more content than any exotic bird could ever be in its cage of jade and ivory.

"Baron Tazumi is considerable rich," the pretty captive babbled on. "So he can have many households. But I always so happy when he come to this So Ko. I wait for him here all time. I have no name like Japanese woman, so he make me one name for himself."

"A Japanese name?" asked the caller, who already knew all she cared to know.

"Yiss. He call me Ai."

Anna was thinking, "What a tiny name for a tiny lady!" but the gentle staccato was explaining.

"That name mean two thing. One thing when happy, another thing when sad."

"What does it mean when you are happy?" asked Anna.

"Then it mean Love."

"And when you are sad?"

"Grief!"

The word tinkled like a little bell tolling over a funeral among the fairies.

"Do you love him very much?"

Anna had risen to go.

"Ah!" For the first time the supple body bent forward. "I am not his wife. Therefore I can say how much and not feel shamed for it."

"I must be going now," said Anna. "It's nearly eleven, and Suko-san will soon be back."

She could feel nothing more than a maternal pity for this lost child of another code.

"Yiss," agreed Mees Kim. "But first I tell you what I ask."

The Korean woman had got down from her chair, and again her body bent a little.

"When you marry to Tazumi you will not kill me also!"
"Kill you?"

In spite of the tension—or perhaps because of it—Anna could have laughed at this last request.

"Why should I kill you?" she inquired.

"Suko-san say you will," declared Mees Kim. "She tell me how all American lady when they marry gentleman make him kill all his households. Will this be so?"

Mees Kim's slant eyes were twinkling so pathetically up at the superior being that Anna could have taken her in her arms.

"I'm not going to marry Baron Tazumi, my dear," said Anna.

"No?"

The long eyes were now completely puzzled.

"Why you no should marry to him? He most kind man of all world. I could tell you that. He most noble man you find."

"Good-by, Miss Kim!"

Upon an unreasoning impulse Anna stooped down and kissed one of the tea-rose cheeks of the captive sprite. Frightened at the barbaric demonstration, the little Korean backed away a step, then opened the door soundlessly.

"Goo'-by!" she said.

When Anna returned to her hotel room she found Zudie dressed for the street.

"Anna," she cried, "how queer you look! Has anything awful happened?"

"No, it hasn't happened, dear," said Anna softly. "I've been saved from it by a miracle. And now let's pack and get out as soon as we can."

"But the Baron's calling at noon."

"I know," replied Anna. "And that's why we must hurry."

CHAPTER XX: HENRY'S TRANSLATIONS

i

THE week preceding harvest time brought dreamy days to Anna Bly and Zudie Brand. Orchards were purple with the small, sweet plums poised on their branches, awaiting the day when they should fall to earth, borne down by their own ripeness. Every day Anna prayed that the harvest would be to-morrow. She wanted to be busy again—in a fury of labor.

With every hour a fear grew in her—fear of the smiling yellow people who encircled her about. Her eyes had been opened to the real Tazumi, and in unreasonable reaction she began to distrust his entire race. Yet she had no grounds for disliking him, she told herself. Measured by his own standards, he was still a very noble gentleman, quite unblamable for following the customs of his country. Only his standards were not hers.

Her cheeks would flush with the thought of the weak hour in which she had regarded him, driven as she was by necessity, as a marriageable possibility.

She had left San Francisco without seeing him again. He must have known why. Zudie had hinted that he would never forgive the slight. Was Anna growing to fear this little man whose influence could reach from Tokio to Washington, from Washington to the remotest corner of Orient-ridden California?

In Zudie's face, too, she read the picture of distress. Her little sister's eyes were unusually serious as she walked alone by the river or sat in the shadows of the veranda

reading to Nan and Kipps. Anna's fate was to stand alone, she now felt. Dunc Leacy had deserted her to all appearances. His capable person was absent from the Bly porch, and his absence was felt. Quite evidently Anna's presence at Tazumi's party had settled something in Leacy's prejudiced mind.

Sometimes Anna thought she could see his big roadster dashing rapidly along the road through Bly. She hated herself for the wish that it would pause at the white gate and turn in as it used to do.

As harvest week approached Matsu and Shimba grew noisy with implements of wood and iron. The drama centered round the gallows tree, where a lye kettle was soon to simmer. Shimba, urging the big gray mare, would gallop cross-lots with a wagonload of crates to dump them clattering on a pile beside the dipping platform. All day Matsu was stacking the long flat trays upon which the prunes would be drying ere the change of another moon. Out in the orchards the Japanese citizens from Hawaii drove the old brown horse, which had been hitched to a contrivance designed to smooth and flatten the soil in the circles where the fruit would fall. Mrs. Matsu waddled in and out of the shed carrying chemicals with which to scour the lye kettle. Preparation was in the air, and the sight was consoling to Anna's eyes.

But now began the race with the weather. Brilliant sunshine had ceased; mornings were dull and rain clouds frowned above the far Sierras. A week of rain in the midst of picking season can play havoc with a prune harvest—fruit will mildew on the drying ground and half a season's crop will be cast to the swine.

Rain was in the air. Every morning Shimba would raise his flat nose and sniff like a hunting dog. Surely heaven was threatening the farmer with a new unkindness.

Henry Johnson, the Eurasian philosopher, remained the one calm amidst turmoil. He lurked in out-of-the-way places, his object, quite frankly, to avoid work. The sight of him never failed to drive Susan Skelley to distraction.

"The wall-eyed pickerel wid a Chinee face and a Jew nose!" she stormed. "He ain't useful an' he ain't ornamental. Anny Chinee's good for washin' clothes. Will he wash clothes? He will not! When I set 'im to turnin' th' wringer, what does he do? Stands there wid his mule face, talkin' about th' municipal polityicks av ancient Greece. An' he should know about grease, if annywan does. He's made av ut. Aven th' Japs'll have nawthin' to do wid um. An' what the Japs won't touch is spoilt—it's true, I'm tellin' ye."

Susan would finish her diatribe with a moment of relenting, characteristically Celtic.

"Wid all them ann-sisters fightin' inside his sowl, he gits away wid ut pretty well, I'll say ut. He talks in his sleep to avide wor-r-k, but he says somethin' now an' agin'. An' mark me wor-r-d, there's an Irish potato somewhere on his fam'ly tree."

Over Henry Johnson's frowzy head Susan's criticism popped as harmlessly as hail pops from the stony skull of an ancient image in the gardens of old Nippon. Henry's constant stream of theorizing whenever she saw him convinced Anna that Susan was right in at least one particular—Henry talked in his sleep to avoid work.

One lowering afternoon—Anna had sent Henry over to the sheds to help Shimba with the trays—she heard a peculiar mirthless cackle of laughter floating from the willow trees down by the stream, which had shrunk to a silvery thread during the dry months. Henry had not presented himself at the shed. She found him smoking by the river, his back against a twisted trunk. Several newspapers lay in the weeds beside him, and in his hands he held another,

seemingly the object of his jeers. So deep was his abstraction that she came almost upon him, and could see the characters on the newspapers. They were Japanese.

At that instant Henry reached another humorous passage apparently, for he raised his cackle shriller than before.

"Japanese funny papers?" asked Anna, always unable to scold the poor Eurasian.

"Very," agreed Henry, rising and showing Anna to a seat on a log. This was done with a flourish as though the river bank were his own drawing-room.

"You ought to know"—she tried her best to be severe—"that this is a busy time on the ranch."

"I should," he agreed with a suppressed yawn. "But what are you going to do with me, Mrs. Bly? The subject of prunes bores me this afternoon. Like Horace, grown a little bald, my only desire is to drowse like a dog in some sunny corner of Sabina."

"That's all very well, Henry," she persisted, "but when you're working for wages—"

"That's a subject I wanted to bring up," he declared, raising a long hand. "Do you realize that you are paying me entirely too much? I have decided to strike for shorter hours and a smaller wage. Suppose you cut me a dollar a day, and allow me an hour in the afternoons to read my Japanese papers and enjoy a good laugh. There is all too little laughter in this world."

"Just what do you find to laugh at in your papers?" she inquired, her curiosity roused.

"In playing with a hornet's nest, who can say which one of the interesting insects has been the first to sting? Having no sense of humor, the Japanese can be very funny. This paper I am holding is a representative organ of San Francisco. It is written entirely for Nipponese consumption, and because the language is quite difficult for Americans, it speaks out and says about what it wants to.

"Here, for instance, is a sprightly item about the Natural

Energy Fruit and Land Company. It praises the energy of K. Sato, the fifteen-million-dollar organizer, and calls him the greatest orator in America. 'Because,' it says, 'in a land where money alone talks sweetly the Honorable Sato can if necessary command sufficient golden language to outtalk the United States Senate.'

Anna had accepted Henry's log, from whose farther end she saw his queer gray eyes twinkling under their flat lids as he stood respectfully.

"Rather humorous that, eh what?" he asked.

"I fail to see it," admitted Anna, folding her hands. "What else is there to laugh at?"

"Our mutual friend, Baron Tazumi, has broken out again," he announced, squinting into the perpendicular lines of the front page.

"Has he?"

He glanced sharply at her over the top of the paper and prefaced his reading with the explanation: "The Japanese have a proverb which says, 'You cannot tear paper the wrong way,' much as you say, 'You cannot float up stream.' You know how hard it is to whistle and sing at the same time? Well, our distinguished racial half brother seems to have perfected himself in the art. A sweet song of love for American interviewers. A sharp whistle of hate for Japanese readers: I wonder what has happened to the Baron? Never before has he been so openly bitter against the blond race of which I am a poor half portion."

"I can't imagine," answered Anna, though she had made her guess. "But what does he say?"

"He has gone to Seattle, it seems, and was given an ovation by the Japanese there. It was one of those spontaneous affairs carefully arranged by the Beneficent Society. The account of his speech is headed, 'Jewel Words from Great Lips.' Here is a handful of those gems:

"'Be of stout heart, my people, for ye are sprung from the land of the gods. Even though you go forth into the

outlands to toil among mocking tribes, yet heaven is with you because the divine Emperor is with you.

“They cannot check our peaceful progress in this land, or in any other where our divine Emperor has sent us to toil in his name. If they build laws to wall themselves about and exclude us we will tear down those laws or dig under them. In America we are already inside, and we shall remain for the glory of the Emperor.

“Small as we are in numbers here, let us see to it that our race shall increase. Seed of Yamato, germinate anew! Beget, beget, beget! While the Emperor permitted it, it was well that you brought wives from the homeland—young wives, and fertile. And now it is more important still that we marry into this American stock. Prove your race equality in the blood of your children. Choose white women if you can. Where this is not practicable, marry negroes, Indians, Hawaiians.

“Do not fear that our race shall be lost in such a mingling of blood. The blood of Japan is immortal, because it is descended from the sun goddess, Amaterasu. Plant it where you will, Yamato’s seed shall never die. Even unto the tenth generation Japanese with blond skins and blue eyes will still be Japanese, quick with the one God-given virtue—loyalty to empire and the Emperor.”

Henry Johnson ceased to read and permitted the paper to fall across his shabby shoes.

“What else did he say?” asked Anna in a choking voice.

“Not much,” smiled Henry. “After these few remarks ice cream was served and a good time was enjoyed by all present.”

She struggled a while with a difficult question, then said,

“Henry, do many of the Japanese want to—to marry white women?”

"Well," he informed her, "you have just heard the Baron's speech translated."

"I can't believe that he could suggest anything so cold-blooded."

"The temperature of blood," drawled Henry Johnson, "is merely a relative matter. What seems cold in California may seem warm in Japan. Suicide, for instance. Here it is a crime, there a virtue. Nippon applauds the hero who operates upon himself with a short sword."

"Henry, you exaggerate," his employer cautioned him. "Hara-kiri has gone out of style in Japan."

"Yes? Not so many years ago General Nogi murdered himself in order to join his old Emperor in the land of souls. He had no sooner struck the blow than all Nippon cried, 'There dies the last gentleman in Japan!' To-day Nogi is enshrined as a god with an altar of his own and plenty of priests to comfort his spirit with incense. It makes a pretty picture. Religion and politics again, you observe."

"Why do the Japanese want to marry into other races?" Anna broke in.

"Just look at me!" snarled Henry Johnson. "Am I not a noble example of inter-marriage?"

"But why do they want it?" she persisted.

"They want to borrow your stature," he said. "They have already borrowed your telegraph instruments, your educational systems, your military equipment, your advertising methods. They have borrowed your brain, but they cannot change their bodies without one thing—intermarriage. Don't you see? Four feet six wants to become six feet four. Then Japan will have everything."

"Your theories are sometimes a trifle far-fetched, I am afraid," said Anna, rising.

Henry Johnson bowed with the air of a great gentleman showing a guest out of his drawing-room.

"I suppose so. And now, Mrs. Bly, in pursuance of my

far-fetchedness, will you permit me to say something for your own good?"

She stared at his badly joined features, and found there nothing of the mocking look they usually wore for the world. Every muscle in his queer face was tense with a burning seriousness, and his voice deepened as he said: "This is an impertinence. I am of very little use to you as a laborer, Mrs. Bly, but I am devoted to you and to your sister. You have shown kindness to a mongrel dog, and though he may snap and bite at others, it is never at you."

"I appreciate that, Henry," said Anna, pitying and wondering at the same time.

"If you wish to send me away for what I'm going to say it will be all right. I have earned enough here, and I shall be going back—back home pretty soon."

"I shan't send you away," she promised, "but please tell me."

"Mrs. Bly, would you like to have this smart fellow, Mr. Oki, for a brother-in-law?"

"Mr. Oki!" she cried. "What in the world do you mean?"

"The Japanese all over Bly are gossiping of his ambitions—that's all."

"What idle, silly nonsense, Henry!" she said.

"Exactly." He thrust his hands into his shabby pockets. "But I am telling you what Mr. Oki is permitting his friends to believe."

"But he's never seen my sister more than half a dozen times."

"In Japan that would be regarded as a great many."

How Zudie would laugh, thought Anna, when she heard of this! Yet to Anna it was no laughing matter.

"Some time when we are not all so busy," the mongrel philosopher was drawling on, "I shall tell you about my-

self. Maybe you will see then what occurs in improving the Japanese race."

Anna stood in a daze, looking through the willow twigs down to the river below. On the steep bank her active, freckled Kipps was flying a Japanese kite which he had borrowed from John Matsu. Purple winged, demon faced, gaudily colored, it darted spitefully and ascended in wild swoops. Across its paper belly she could see the three black characters in Japanese.

"Those are strange words written on the kite," Henry Johnson was saying.

But Anna moved away toward the ranch house.

CHAPTER XXI: STRATEGIC RETREAT

i

NOW the prune has been chosen among the fruits of the earth to be a thing of affectionate ridicule. It is the food of humorists, its only rival being the lemon—also an important product of the state of California. The economical sugary quality of the prune has immortalized it in the annals of boarding-house wit; the newspaper paragrapher would be at a loss for an adequate substitute. In the dear dead days when eating was regarded as a necessity rather than a luxury the prune was looked upon as something to be pitied because of its generous abundance. Colorless and ineffectual people were labeled Prune—in exaggerated cases Poor Prune. At least so it was in the crowded cities where hard asphalt smothered Mother Nature and the eye grew inflamed from the gaudy flippancy of theatrical posters.

But in the warm dry valleys of California the prune has never been a joke. There in late summer and early fall wide acres are empurpled with the drying fruit, laid out on many trays under a beneficent sun. The entire labor market is unsettled by the harvest. Warehouses groan, box cars are filled to bursting, fortunes are made and lost in speculation on this fruit of mediocrity.

The sky continued to lower, but the black clouds held rain like a threat over Sacramento Valley. The crop had come on in earnest now. Sufficient fruit had fallen to the ground to justify a half force of Japanese pickers.

It was no wonder then that Anna Bly's heart was thrilled

with the spectacle of Shimba's men busy under the trees. The old gray mare, straining at the traces, brought his cart-loads of fruit-laden boxes to the busy lye kettle and trotted back again with empty crates. Matsu stood on the platform beside the steaming broth, pouring ripe prunes into the basket, while the efficient boy, John Matsu, managed the old brown horse, which had been hitched to the pulley rope for the purpose of lowering prune loads into the lye solution and hoisting them out again, a process which grew into obsolescence in the days of President McKinley.

Everybody was at work now. Anna, Zudie and little Kipps each got a bucket and labored on hands and knees, picking the ripe blue plums off the ground along the orchard rows. Mrs. Matsu and Shimba's child wife, hidden under their big sunbonnets, crouched beneath the trees, picking and picking. Shimba picked, too, but his industry was often interrupted by his task of slave driving.

The prune gang worked short hours for the first few days, because, as Shimba explained, the fruit would not be dropping in quantity for another week.

"We'll be rich, Shimba!" exclaimed Anna one night as she stood with her Asiatic coworker and looked down into a bin. The floor was already covered with her purple, wrinkled treasures.

"Good prune!" replied Shimba stolidly.

His eyes, twinkling like black coals through the slits in his mask, disturbed her with a feeling of uneasiness.

"What's the matter, Shimba? Aren't they coming on all right?"

"Plenty nice prune," he answered, and showed his protruding teeth in a grin. "Much few now. To-morrow more, maybe. Next day more. Prune no begin to jump off tree earnestly yet. Then I get more Japanese boy. We fetch everything nice O. K."

"Could anything happen now?" she urged, faint with an unreasonable fear.

"Rain could happen," he replied. "Prune too much plenty. 'Mission merchant pay twerve se' a pound this districk for best style prune. In Santa Crara Varrey he pay fo'teen."

"They raise better prunes in the Santa Clara Valley," she admitted again.

"Oh, pretty prune from there! All best business prune come from Santa Crara," he twinkled. "But you keep happy, boss. Prune happen O. K."

These were but the days of minor engagements before the battle when the prunes, as Shimba had promised, should begin jumping earnestly off trees. Every afternoon at about four o'clock the elegant Mr. Oki would come sauntering down the drive to stroll through the orchards and poke the low-lying fruit with the ferrule of his cane. Then he would walk over to the ranch house to make pretty presents and prettier compliments.

Anna always arranged that Zudie, at the calling hour, was either out driving or lying down or busy in the kitchen. Several times she was on the point of telling him candidly just why Miss Brand was not to be seen, but Oki gave her no chance. There was the elusive thing about the man. He seemed to sense the situation without so much as a word. He never asked about Zudie or betrayed that he recognized her existence. He seemed to take his rejection by proxy with sublime calm.

One afternoon—it was on the eve of the big day when picking on a grand scale was to begin—his manner irritated Anna to a point where she forgot herself and spoke directly.

"Mr. Oki," she said, "haven't you taken a great deal for granted?"

"Oh, Mrs. Bly!" he exclaimed, not troubling to ask what he had taken for granted.

"You have been spreading idle reports about my sister among the Japanese."

"Ah, I suspect it! Some evil brain has been gossiping to discredit me."

"Yes," she agreed, "I should say that it does discredit you, Mr. Oki."

"You must not believe that woman," he told her, speaking under his breath.

"What woman?"

"That Mrs. Awaga and her preacher. If you knew, Mrs. Bly! All Japanese in town are sorry to have such bad people here. Always to make mischief and spread false lies."

"Mrs. Awaga hasn't said a word to me," declared Anna. "She is as good a Christian woman as I know; she would never spread a false report."

"Ah, if you knew, Mrs. Bly!" he persisted with his pious smile. "I, too, am a Christian, Mrs. Bly. But I could not think of those Awagas representing that sacred doctrine."

"I don't doubt your sincerity," said Anna, though that was the very thing she doubted.

"And if I make a bad impression upon your farm, please inform me to keep away," implored the elegant Mr. Oki.

"I'm sorry that you've been misrepresented," she demurred.

Whereupon he said an astonishing thing.

"Do you entertain some race prejudices against my respects to your sister?"

"I don't know what you mean," said Anna.

"Matrimonial respects," he announced mellifluously.

"Since you put it so plainly," she replied, hot blood rushing to her cheeks, "I most certainly do."

"Ah!" Mr. Oki rose and made his most elaborate bow. "Then that is where I am more broad-minded than you, Mrs. Bly," he said triumphantly. "Good afternoon, Mrs. Bly!"

Whatever indignation burned in her heart that night was blown away by the dramatic turn of the morrow.

She had set her alarm clock for five and gone to sleep praying that rain would not overtake them, for she knew that the harvest was now on full blast and Shimba would bring an augmented force into the field to begin the season's real work.

Anna and Zudie and Susan Skelley had finished breakfast by lamplight, having eaten nervously, as soldiers will before the hour of battle. Zudie, who had been all moods since she had quarreled again with Sid Footridge, was the first to go into the field. Anna hurried through her household duties. She was upstairs bathing little Nan when Zudie came back, curiously calm as she entered the room.

"Ann," she began, "weren't the pickers to begin early this morning?"

"Why, I understood so."

Anna's heart went cold as she stood facing that calm look.

"There's not a person stirring on the place. They haven't built a fire under the kettle. The horse is still unharnessed. They—"

"Zude, what on earth are you talking about?" Anna fairly screamed as she dropped the wash cloth at Nan's feet.

She went scurrying down the stairs and out into the orchards. Fruit lay thick like a circular blue carpet under every tree. No sound came to her ears but the song of meadow larks, irritatingly beautiful. Distantly, too, she could hear tractors chug-chugging on the main road.

What pestilence had struck her farm? Where were her pickers? Over the cold lye kettle the prune basket swung neglected on its gallows. The empty wagon stood, its thills upraised, beside a silent stable.

This was madness! She ran down the stubby path to-

ward the shedlike houses on the river bank. She passed John Matsu flying his hideous-faced kite against the leaden sky.

"Where's your father?" she asked harshly.

"What say, boss?" he stared blankly.

"Don't you understand English?"

"No un'stand."

"What do you go to school for?" she shrilled.

"No un'stand."

He ran away, the demon kite plunging at him as he ran.

By Shimba's open door she found the picture bride gazing at her like a frightened little animal.

"Where is your husband?" asked Anna, trying to show kindness to this beaten thing.

"No un'stand."

"Isn't there anybody here?"

"No un'stand."

Anna plunged into the house to meet Shimba shaving leisurely by the window.

"What's the meaning of all this, Shimba?" she accosted him. "The prunes are falling in tons on the ground. There isn't a picker in sight."

"Strike," he said, and showed his protruding teeth through a coat of lather.

"Strike!"

She could have torn the little house from its foundations and brought it crashing down on Shimba's bullet head.

Shimba waited until he had wiped the fluffy mat from his chin, then he showed his brightest smile to explain "Japanese boy no like this place. Too bad. I lose prenty money —you lose prenty money. I no could do something to make him stay. Laba condition too wicked this year."

"What do they want? Why didn't you tell me?"

"They kick too much. Ode-fashion prune-dip work make all boys mad."

"I offered to get you a new dipping machine long ago," she reminded him.

Shimba went on shaving.

"Aren't you going to do anything?" she panted, settling down on a rough chair to spare her trembling knees.

"I go to Sac-er-mento," he explained. "There mebbe I can find some more laba condition."

"Can't you hurry?" she urged, on the point of weeping. "The fruit will be rotting by night."

"I could do what possible," he volunteered.

"We'll all of us pick," she said. "Matsu and his wife and John and my sister and I and Kipps."

"Matsu and his wife go too," announced Shimba cheerfully, grinning into the mirror.

"Go? Where did they go?"

"They make strike with everybody."

Indignation surged back into her heart. She thought of the care she had given Matsu's fifth baby, of the devotion she had shown the woman in those hours when help was needed. So Matsu and his wife had gone too!

"What in the name of mercy did they strike for?" she asked as soon as she was able.

"Laba condition," was all she could get out of her lessee.

"But don't you care? You'll be losing your share too."

"I care prenty," he grunted. "But could I do something by cry? I get prenty Japanese boy too quick."

Anna gave up and went out into the fields. What insane odds were against her now! Three women and a boy to lift those heavy trays and manage a basket which two strong men could scarcely swing. Even though they could pick the prunes off the ground, who was to attend to the more important work of drying them?

The elegant Mr. Oki came sauntering down the drive.

"Good morning, Mrs. Bly!" he said, giving his cocoa-butter smile as he lifted his hat. "Labor trouble, I see.

Isn't it abominable? These I. W. W. fellow do make some inroads into my own people, I fear."

"Will you tell me one thing—as honestly as you can?" she asked him coldly.

"A thousand, Mrs. Bly."

"Why have those Japanese chosen this time for a strike?"

"They are very superstitious, Mrs. Bly," smiled Oki apologetically. "This we cannot educate out of them. You will remember how the late Mrs. Shimba committed hanging out in your garage?"

"What has that to do with it?"

"They are ver-r-y prejudiced against places with ghosts on them, Mrs. Bly. A foolish thing for which I am much ashamed."

CHAPTER XXII: APPARITIONS

i

IN books of mythology Anna had read of tasks which sarcastic gods had imposed upon mortals for their undoing. There was a Norse hero, who—to save his neck—was required to drain a giant drinking horn while the sly gods poured all the ocean in at the other end. Proud Hercules, too, had been demoted to the rank of stable boy and required to accomplish a nightmare task single-handed.

But hero men had been endowed with hero strength with which to meet their trials. Anna was not strong bodily; this she had learned after the first hard tests on the farm. It was all very well on the hour when labor had betrayed her for her to make heroic resolutions. It was all very well for Zudie to put an arm round her waist and say, "We'll work it out some way, Ann. Women can pick prunes, and between us we'll be able to save most of the crop until Shimba hires another gang."

"Forty acres of them!"

Anna looked despairingly across the mathematical precision of her orchards, where the sun, which broke fiercely through the threatening clouds, was already turning ripeness to decay. From every tree the little plums were falling. The round blue carpets were thickening into mounds.

Nevertheless the women plunged, as best they could, into the task which the sneering god of growing things had imposed upon them. It was like opposing an army with bare hands. Kipps was the only enthusiastic member of the amateur harvest crew. To him was given the job of driv-

ing the gray mare between field and the lye kettle. The trips were far too few to suit his taste, because Anna and Zudie and Susan combined made slow work of picking.

Henry Johnson threw himself into the breech with a strength and efficiency of which his employer had never suspected him. Without his brawn the full-laden prune boxes would never have been swung from ground to wagon or been unloaded again beside the cold boiling furnace.

"Th' divvil can wor-r-rk whin th' divvil's to pay," Susan snapped, her chisel face reddened with exertion as she watched Henry's feats of strength.

Zudie laughed, but poor Anna plodded on, too disheartened now for any earthly comedy. By midmorning she saw the futility of the whole thing. Another myth floated into her distracted mind. What hero was it who, when he had chopped off the head of an enemy, found that ten new enemies leaped up from the fallen corpse? No matter! The task, she knew, was far beyond them. They were being buried beneath the tons of their rotting wealth.

Zudie worked bravely, singing, with a forced assumption of cheerfulness. Susan Skelley remained grim but she picked two prunes to Anna's one. Henry Johnson, as he loaded the wagon, lectured on and on.

"There was a Japanese poetess named Choya," he informed his associates as he slouched in the shade of a prune tree. "From her I translate the poem, 'How far have you gone to-day chasing after dragon flies?' This wisdom applies to much of our well-meant exertions."

He stroked his scraggly beard and waited as though courting controversy.

"Here we have demonstrated the power of the strike," he told his audience chattily. "The irresistible force of nothing doing. The pride of modern labor is the labor it does not accomplish. One cannot help admiring the art with which this strike was arranged; it struck at the very soul of the prune, one might say."

"Shut up!" snarled Susan Skelley, approaching with a full bucket.

"Ah, there you have displayed the weakness of the plutocracy! You say, 'Shut up.' I open all the wider."

"Henry," asked Zudie, obviously for the purpose of bringing him down from the heights of reason, "why don't you talk with Shimba and find out what's the matter?"

"Shimba has already gone," announced Henry. "His destination, he says, is a labor bureau in Sacramento."

"That's no reason why his wife and John Matsu shouldn't be working."

"There is a good reason, Miss Brand. Mrs. Shimba and the Matsu boy were in his car when he departed this morning."

Anna looked wearily up, but said nothing. Words were quite beyond her now. Toward the blazing hour of noon she found the courage to ask: "Henry, have you heard the Japanese talking about a ghost in the garage?"

"They are always talking among themselves about ghosts and fox women," he replied, his long face very serious.

"Do you believe they saw the old Mrs. Shimba's ghost?"

Henry Johnson's queer gray eyes twinkled with an elfin light as he replied: "In spiritualism a good medium can compel his audience to see things that are not there."

"Who is the medium in this case, do you think?"

"I should not be surprised if Mr. Oki had gifts in that direction as in others," drawled Henry Johnson.

ii

After lunch, all the boxes being full and stacked round the lye kettle, Anna decided that dipping time had come.

"God bless yer heart," moaned Susan Skelley, "an' ye couldn't boil potatoes an' git 'em right!"

It was Susan who built a twig fire under the lye kettle, complaining busily the while that "wid anny management

we might o' had th' wather in th' kittle hot be now and them prunes, bad luck to them, scalded an' dhry."

It was midafternoon when the amateur crew got actively to work. The god of harvests, looking down from his Japanese heaven, should have pitied the sight. Freckled Kipps, proud of his office, had hitched the old brown horse to a length of rope which passed through block and tackle on the gallows tree. Henry Johnson, refreshed after a comic hour with his Japanese papers, stood on the platform and emptied the first box of prunes into the dipping basket. Zudie had elected to drive the gray mare. Anna and Susan were to load the trays on the wagon, a muscular task for which they were obviously unfitted.

It was a nervous moment when Kipps backed the old brown horse, permitting the first basket of prunes to plunge into the hot lye solution.

"That's enough, darling!" screamed Anna to her son when the basket had been immersed a full minute. "Start the horse—git-ap, Rodger!"

"Git-ap!" shouted Kipps manfully, bringing a willow twig sharply across the brown flanks.

Rodger proved unexpectedly prompt. At the stroke of the twig he leaped forward, dragging Kipps after him at the end of the reins.

"Whoa!" entreated Anna and Susan and Zudie and Henry Johnson in a discordant unison.

In vain their pleadings. Rodger kept right on, and when at last he halted the evil work was done. Something had to give way. The gallows had groaned and bent dangerously, then the block and tackle had come loose, flying through the air less than a foot above Zudie's head.

Had Anna been a man with what a flood of oaths might she have eased her bursting heart! A basket of withered prunes lay scattered over the trodden ground. The air was filled with steaming odors of stewed fruit. Susan Skelley, uttering disdainful grunts, stooped down to gather prunes

in her apron. Anna ran to the disobedient Rodger and unhitched him from his rope.

"Can you beat it?" asked Kipps. "I didn't think the old bird had that much life in him."

"Henry," said Anna in the terrific calm of despair, "do you think anything can be done about that wheel that fell off?"

"Certainly, madam," replied Henry, quite undisturbed. "The nails have merely come loose. What, indeed, are nails for? The nail, you understand, typifies political compromise. Where the strain, on the one hand, is too great and the resistance, on the other, too stubborn——"

"Aw, dry up!" suggested Susan Skelley.

Possibly she was referring to the fire, which had been partially extinguished by an overflow from the lye kettle.

This was but an incident in that hard afternoon which proved to Anna Bly that the gods had imposed a labor beyond her capacity.

The sun was slanting far westward when Henry had at last mended the hoisting apparatus. Much to the indignation of little Kipps, the reins were passed over to Zudie, and another basket of prunes was dipped, hoisted and emptied upon the trays.

"They're quare lookin'," moaned Susan Skelley, studying the lye-immersed fruit which Anna had spread across the slats.

Queer indeed! Half the prunes had failed to wither properly, had swollen to what experts in the craft describe as "frog bellies." The Japanese workmen, as she had watched them, had always brought up a few "frog bellies" and cast them aside as food for swine.

"Perhaps the solution is too strong," suggested the suddenly useful Henry.

They added a bucket of water. The next bucket to come out of the lye contained little besides "frog bellies."

"It's more lye yer're needin'," declared Susan Skelley with an air of superior wisdom.

More lye was added. The prunes that followed resembled nothing so much as a convention of frogs, horribly distended with feeding.

Even this problem might have yielded to experimentation, but the sneering gods willed otherwise.

All afternoon the little girl, Nan, had been scrambling in, out and over every object on the scene of vain endeavor. Inspired by her seven years' genius for getting in the way, she had buzzed like a busy gnat in Anna's ear. Far too distracted to comprehend, Anna had been but vaguely aware of the bright head and checkered pinafore.

"Go sit on the wagon with Kipps, dear," or "Don't play so near the horse," or "Keep away from the kettle, Nan," she had repeated unconsciously as though her other mind —her maternal mind—were speaking for her, watchfully guarding the thing it loved.

Then out of the confusion there had come a scream, a child's scream, followed by Zudie's cry, "Oh, Nan!"

There was a horrid scrambling on the platform. Anna's first thought was that her baby had fallen into the boiling caldron. She saw prunes and boxes flying into air, while Henry Johnson's skinny arms and legs performed the antics of a dancing skeleton. At the foot of the platform a bundle of blue gingham marked Nan's small form, where it had fallen.

"My baby!" shrieked Anna, and fell on her knees beside the motionless heap.

A thin trickle of blood stained the light hair and dripped slowly into the mother's lap. Then Nan opened her eyes and began to cry, a pitiful, welcome sound.

"Baby, what have you done!" moaned Anna, striving to stanch the blood with a corner of her apron.

"Henry wouldn't give me any prunes!" wailed Nan.

"She was crawlin' into the kettle," explained Susan, "an'

she'd 'a' got there but for Hinry. Bad luck to um, he most kilt 'er doin' ut."

So closed the day's work.

Susan, after carrying Nan into the house, made a rough and ready diagnosis. The small girl, snatched from the boiling kettle by Henry's quick hand, had struck her head on a corner of the platform. It was no serious cut, and before six o'clock Nan was asleep in bed, Susan having served as both nurse and surgeon.

iii

After supper the sisters, heartbroken with fatigue and too discouraged for talk, were sitting in the pretty parlor for whose decoration Anna had spent beyond her means. They still maintained a show of calm, and would have gone through that bad hour without breaking the thread of their straining nerves had not Kipps come in with just the question to work mischief. His hair was tousled and in his gummy little hands he held a remarkable fabrication of sticks and canvas.

"I'm making a model airplane," he declared, "and when it flies it'll put all those bum Japanese kites out of business."

"You shouldn't be so slangy, dear," admonished his mother wearily.

"Say, moms," persisted Kipps, "we don't know anything about dipping prunes really, do we?"

"I'm afraid we don't," admitted Anna gently.

"What we ought to have is a he-man on the place. Henry Johnson's all right, but he's an awful highbrow. Why don't we telephone to Dunc Leacy and——"

"It's time you were in bed, Kipps. Come kiss your mother and trot!"

Kipps hesitated over his aviation experiment, then came over to throw himself in his mother's arms.

"Why don't you, mom?" he coaxed, his head buried against her shoulder.

"You're asking too many questions, dear," said Anna softly, passing her fingers through the heavy, sun-bleached hair. "Now go to bed, and don't mess everything up with that airplane."

As soon as he had withdrawn, Zudie looked up from the magazine she had been studying with unseeing eyes.

"Ann," she said, "there was a lot of sense in what Kipps suggested."

"Don't, please!" cried Anna, closing her eyes.

"I wouldn't," persisted her sister, "but we've got ourselves in a tight corner."

"Are you blaming me for that?"

Anna sat up, her face flushed, her eyeballs aching dreadfully. If people would only let her alone!

"I'm not blaming you for anything," Zudie went on, but her face had become drawn under the stress of a temper which would have its way.

"We're in a tight fix, I tell you," she said rapidly, as though her tongue had loosed itself from a controlling brain. "We're here in the wilds, surrounded by Japanese, not a friendly soul in sight. And you hadn't any business quarreling with Dunc Leacy. He might have——"

"You mustn't talk like that to me," Anna broke in. Then a spiteful imp took possession of her and prompted her to ask: "While you're arranging my life for me, why don't you settle your own? If you hadn't been perfectly perverse, you would have taken Sid Footridge and got yourself out of this mess."

"I don't care to discuss it," proclaimed Zudie as she swept out of the room.

It was then that Anna gave way to tears—the easy, unreasoning tears of a child. She was so tired! And so alone! In the darkness of despair she thought of the poor,

crazed Japanese woman who had taken matters in her own hands and hanged herself by a belt out in the garage.

Perhaps the story of ghosts was not a fabrication of Oki's scheming mind. Perhaps the Japanese laborers were right in leaving a place which some evil demon had marked with his everlasting curse.

iv

Passed then a ten days of folded hands and of waiting. Waiting for what? Not any help from Shimba certainly, for the crisis seemed to have driven him into a state of gentle idiocy. Every morning he would crank up his short-nosed car and go rattling away with the cheerful announcement, "I know prenty good Japanese boy somewhere."

Shimba's somewhere was a land of empty dreams apparently, for he always returned about nightfall to back his tinny car into the shed behind his hut.

"To-morrer," he would grin, "I go fetch boy somewhere else."

Into the somewhere his picture bride seemed to have been swallowed. Anna was far too miserable to inquire about this latest disappearance. As days went on she ceased to care about her rotting harvest; ceased to care much as a marooned sailor ceases to care for food. Sometimes she would wander through the orchard to look with lackluster eyes at the fruit which lay in piles, black and sodden. Flocks of birds came out of the sky to feast upon her loss.

Occasionally she would wake to the horror and ask the empty air—the air which sent her only predatory fowl—"Isn't there anything to be done?"

Poor Zudie! With what patient endurance she worked to fill the breach! For hours she would stand at the telephone, pleading with employment agencies in Stockton and Sacramento. Every day she would take to the road, Henry Johnson sitting languidly at the wheel, to search in person among the jungles where that shy bird, labor, might be in

hiding. She would come home at night and try to convert her failures into the form of comic anecdotes, telling how Henry, acting as her envoy, had visited Japanese boarding houses with his highfaluting pleas.

Once she came triumphantly back with two dusty specimens of the Caucasian race. They were blear-eyed brigands of the species known as "fruit bums." Like unclean birds, they were wont to follow the harvest season from Imperial Valley to Napa Valley with the single object—to make the maximum wage with the minimum service. These two specimens were, of course, Industrial Workers of the World.

To demonstrate their independence they spent a pleasant afternoon on the Bly farm, sleeping most of the time. At sunset they went on strike and demanded five dollars apiece, a full day's pay. Anna paid the bribe to get rid of them, because they were dangerous men, with cruel, weak and criminal faces. Then again the calm of despair settled upon her acres.

The morning after their quarrel, Zudie had come to her sister to apologize and be very sweet. Anna had been sweet, too, but she hadn't really cared. Nothing seemed to matter now.

Shimba contributed his share by developing a weakness hitherto unsuspected. He had taken to bootlegger whisky. In the evening, after he had put away his flivver, he would wander through the orchards, a dizzy smile on his unbeautiful face as he sang his native war songs or debated aloud with himself. One evening at dusk Anna found him alone, giggling emptily and clasping his horny hands as if in self-congratulation.

"Rotten!" he chanted, pointing dramatically at the wreck of the fruit harvest.

This brief comment proved more than she could bear. She ordered him off the place, commanded him to do something, to bring her help or drown himself. Shimba took

it all with a beatific smile, and shambled away to the tuneless tune of his native chant.

That was the worst night of all for Anna Bly. The pain, which never left her eyes, was growing insufferable. Figures and events were all awry in her poor head. She scolded Kipps harshly, unreasonably, and failed to understand what Zudie was saying to her. She refused her supper, and when the moon rose among the drifting clouds she went again to wander through her mocking acres. The smell of rotting fruit sickened her, yet she walked through it with a morbid stubbornness. Too late to do anything now! Or was it? Half a harvest still clung to the abominable branches. She could see the heavy fruit gleaming mockingly under the moon.

What was that? Something stirred just beyond her. Among the trunks she could see a white skirt flutter, pause and flutter again. Could it be? Had the maddened woman who had done herself to death——

Anna stood stricken, still as any trunk among the orchard rows.

“Anna!” she heard the call, and it was a frozen minute before she recognized her sister’s voice.

“Anna, my dear,” cried Zudie, coming into full moonlight, “you shouldn’t be out this way with nothing round you. It’s dreadfully cold.”

“I’m not cold,” said Anna impatiently.

Zudie laid a hand over her sister’s forehead, then almost dragged her into the house. There was no need of force, because Anna came gently enough. Everything seemed to have grown suddenly pleasant. Then she would think of Mrs. Shimba’s ghostly form, of the frightful specter hanging to a beam.

“I can’t settle anything,” she kept saying over and over.

“If ye’d only listen to reason, an’ not go tryin’ somethin’ ye can’t finish ye’d be a well woman the now,” Susan Skel-

ley was telling her out of the confusion. "Bed's th' place for ye, an' there ye should o' been these manny days."

Anna was vaguely aware that some one had undressed her and that she was lying in a bed of fire, working, working to make something out of the puzzle. Familiar shapes she recognized now and then; she seemed to be looking at them through a bright tube which shut everything else out of her sight. She saw Kipps standing at the end of the tube, his face white as the night drawers he wore.

"Moms," he was saying, "you just stop worrying! I guess we can fix things all right."

Then he, too, faded away.

Out of jumbled visions of Japanese ghosts and heavy fruit trays and Oki's irritating politeness and Dunc Leacy's roughly soothing laugh she woke to reason, and found that a shabby little man with an abalone watch charm was holding her by the wrist.

"How long has she been this way?" he was asking in that sick-room whisper which falls like a pall on the invalid's sense.

"Since ten o'clock," Zudie's cool voice was responding.

In the dim light Anna could read the dial of a round-faced clock in the hall. Half past four.

"I'm all right," she declared, struggling to sit up.

"You will be, Mrs. Bly," smiled the shabby man. "But you'd better take it easy. It's a hectic time, getting in the fruit crop. And I guess these labor conditions—"

"We'll settle that all right!" cut in Zudie in the voice of a benevolent liar intent upon easing the sick mind.

"I'm sorry I was so long," apologized the doctor. "Another obstetrical case—Japanese."

He went fumbling among his instruments to bring out a small nickel-plated tube.

"If you'll just bring me a teaspoon," he said to Zudie, and turning to Anna asked, "You won't object to a quarter grain of morphia?"

"I won't object to anything," moaned Anna, turning her tired head upon the pillow.

After the needle had pricked her skin, the doctor tiptoed over to the light and turned it down. Then he pulled a chair to her bedside and sat stark and patient in the semi-darkness. His spectral appearance made her nervous. She wished he would go. Then she looked into his kindly Caucasian features and felt a certain comfort in the white man's presence. A delicious softness was stealing through her veins.

v

When she woke hot sunlight showed under the eastern window shade. Anna lay languid and relaxed. She was very still, wondering a little that her worries of the night should have passed so peacefully away. She was only tired —too tired to worry.

Zudie came in quietly, and from beneath half-closed lids Anna studied the face she loved. Zudie looked very pale and more solemn than she had ever appeared before. Her eyes were rimmed with red. Had she been crying?

"Zudie, come here," said Anna, putting out her hand. "You're not worrying about me, are you?"

"No, dear," replied Zudie. "You gave me rather a start last night. But you're a lot better, aren't you?"

"I'm perfectly all right. You look so beat out. You must get some sleep."

"Oh, I'm fit as a fiddle. It's only—"

A little girl in a calico pinafore appeared at the door, a patch of sticking plaster showing under her blond curls.

"Good morning, Nan!" cried Anna. "Aren't you coming in to kiss your moms?"

"Yes," replied the child, but she stopped in the middle of the floor.

"You'd better run away!" commanded Zudie, a curious concern in her troubled eyes.

"I want Kipps," declared Nan, her hands clasped stubbornly behind her.

"Kipps?"

A fearful intuition caused Anna to sit bolt upright in bed.

"Zudie, what's the matter? What's the matter with Kipps?"

"Nothing, dear. Now lie down. Kipps is all right."

"He's not all right!" declared Nan, beginning to sniffle. "He's went away. Somebody's took him. Last night he was in bed, and his clothes is there, and he's not there."

"Tell me the truth," demanded Anna in a soft and terrible tone.

"He's gone," began Zudie.

"Gone?"

Zudie spoke in the dry voice which we use when the worst must be told.

"Susan's been out hunting for him since dawn—she found his bed empty. I can't think it's serious—oh, Anna!"

"And you've let me lie here!" raved the mother, leaping out of bed. "Why haven't you told me?"

"How could I? Anna, dear, please——"

But Anna Bly was beyond reasoning with. She stood there in her night clothes, her hair disheveled and in her eyes as wild a look as ever came from the old fox woman of the orchards.

"He might come back any time," Zudie's brave voice was repeating through the evil enchantment.

"Yes, he might come back," echoed Anna's white lips.

There came into her troubled soul a bitter voice to say, "Nothing that is lost comes back!" And Anna had lost so much.

"You say he's gone?" she repeated the stupid question. "Of course, there's some mistake."

"Yes, dear," Zudie's soothing voice came to her. "Get back into bed, please. We'll bring him to you."

Susan Skelley came in at that instant, and the sick woman's brain confused her appearance with a terrific racket like the grinding of machinery and the blowing of horns.

"Look out o' the winda, wud ye!" she demanded. "An' ef ye'll tell what's there I'll eat ut."

Zudie was the first to look. No sooner had she torn aside the curtains than she screamed aloud.

"Anna, look! Darling—it's all right! See what he's brought!"

Anna now realized that the mechanical roaring had come from the driveway outside. Leaning feebly against the window ledge, she beheld a spectacle stranger than any that her fever dreams had summoned.

A long procession was coming slowly down the orchard road. To the fore an automobile made its dignified progress toward the house. Following close behind came a heavy service truck, its body brimming over with sooty-faced, turbanned little men.

Directly below the bedroom window the automobile came to a halt. Who was that all brilliant in the purity of night drawers who, held aloft by strong arms, waved frantically in the morning sun?

"Kipps!"

Anna threw open the window and screamed his name.

"Mother!" the runaway bawled out. "I told you I would—I've fetched 'em, mother!"

Then it was that Anna got sight of the strong man who was holding Kipps at arm's length. Dunc Leacy sat there blushing like an American Beauty rose.

CHAPTER XXIII: THE GIRL FROM OROVILLE

i

AS Kipps had said, what the place needed was a he-man. And during the first days of Anna's convalescence the he-man was there much of the time, and his influence always. She felt his strength in the busy harvest scene outside, for the mysterious little Hindus labored tirelessly, as if galvanized by Leacy's power, seen or unseen.

The doctor had told her not to worry, and she was too languid to contemplate her troubles with any degree of zest. It was a luxury to be taken care of. To-morrow she might reckon the costs, but to-day was for rest.

Leacy came almost every day, but his appearances were usually businesslike. He no longer joked about the antiquity of her prune-dipping apparatus. Instead he made the crude contrivance his serious concern. From her hammock couch on the veranda she would watch his active figure as he stood on the platform bossing the lye kettle. Sometimes his heroic pose would remind her of Sydney Carton about to face the cruel kiss of Madame Guillotine.

"It is a far, far better thing that I do," he might have been saying; but his words were actually less dramatic and more he-mannish than that.

He knew every Hindu by name; more than that, he knew every dark spot on every Hindu's ancestry. He was never wasteful with his oaths, but when they came they hit true to the mark. He handled the little sooty men with a rough good humor, and they seemed to adore him. Prunes flew from orchard to kettle, from kettle to drying ground.

"Moms," said Kipps, breathless with admiration, "Dunc

can get work out of anything. He even makes Henry Johnson come to time."

"Can he get work out of you?" asked Anna.

"Me?" Kipps' eyes shone in contemplation of his idol. "Why, mom, he can't get along without me. He says so himself."

Late in the afternoon Dunc Leacy would come rather self-consciously to the porch and sit a while beside the couch hammock. Though their talks were cheerful and pleasant, they never reached the note of that radiant afternoon when Dunc had made his preposterous wager. When she tried to thank him for the generous thing he had done he would color a little and resort to "Oh, pshaw!" then turn the subject.

Between him and Kipps, however, she managed to get a fairly accurate account of what had brought him to her rescue as miraculously as though Aladdin had rubbed his lamp and a genie had appeared out of thin Arabian air.

"Kipps had Paul Revere beaten at the first turn," was the way Dunc expressed it when he related that call in the dead of night which had summoned him from sleep.

Iron-shod hoofs had been heard beating the road up to the Leacy house at four o'clock in the morning. Dunc had poked his head from an upper window to behold a tiny white-clad figure mounted on an ancient brown horse whose shaggy hide gleamed with sweat under a sinking moon.

"Hey there, Dunc," a treble voice had shrilled, "the Japs are on a strike!"

"Whose Japs?" Dunc had inquired, rubbing sleep from his eyes.

"Mom's," the small voice had replied.

Marietta Leacy was away on a visit to New York, therefore Dunc, as lord of bachelor's hall, had received his unexpected guest and wrung the facts from him. There had been no workers on the Brand farm for more than a week; prunes were rotting, the year's harvest was going to waste.

Kipps' mother had collapsed under the strain. Therefore the boy had taken matters into his own hands, crawled out of bed and climbed upon Rodger's bare back.

Dunc had gone forth at dawn to parley with his Hindus. A gang of twenty men had been laid off the night before, so the case had proved comparatively simple.

"I'll never forget it," said Anna when Dunc, sitting stiffly beside the box hammock, explained it all.

"Pshaw!" said Dunc. He flushed again, then added the uneasy assurance. "I wouldn't see a neighbor get in wrong like that!"

What was happening in Dunc Leacy's heart? Fight it away as she might, the question constantly recurred.

Anna had few callers during her weeks of invalidism. Shimba came once or twice when Zudie relaxed her vigilance, and it was plain that the unsuccessful manager was far from pleased with Dunc's solution of the labor problem.

"Those Hindu very bad boy!" he complained.

"They're better than nobody, aren't they?" asked Anna, giving way to her irritation in defiance of doctor's orders.

"Mebbe yes. Mebbe no. They do not think nice with Japanese."

"I choose to have them here," declared Anna, thoroughly roused. "This is my farm, and half the crop is mine. If you can't find labor to pick the fruit you've got to be satisfied with the men I bring in."

Black coals glared spitefully through the slits in Shimba's mask.

"Pretty bad job from those Hindu race," was his only defense as he shambled away.

Mrs. Awaga, the preacher's wife, came almost every morning, and her calls were never unwelcome. Of all her acquaintances among the Japanese, Anna found in this prim

little being the one satisfactory example. She was a Christian woman, without any display of piety or sirupy cant. She seemed to approach life's tangled problems with a goodness and simplicity almost primitive in their pure faith.

The gilded shadow of Buddhism across from her husband's shabby church never ceased to trouble her.

"My husband say I am jealous," she remarked in one of her confidences. "But he, too, takes it much inside his heart. I often search myself to ask if it is jealousy. Perhaps there is some of that there. But the thought of it always make me sad. I feel that there is great wicked power behind that Buddhist temple and that it has been put there to mock."

"My husband and I"—in nearly every breath she spoke adoringly of the wee man in the frock coat—"it make us so happy when we were called to that church."

It was as though she were mentioning St. Thomas's on Fifth Avenue!

"We had been a long time in America, working in mission schools. My husband had always said that America was best ground for spreading good gospel. Then think how pleased we get when we came to this church in this midst of such a large community! My husband says that Christianity is the great door to freedom in Japan. Idolatry is sickness that keep us apart from other civilized people. So long as we bow down to idol—either of flesh or stone—we cannot enter the house of democracy."

"Who is your idol of flesh?" asked Anna, intrigued by the odd phrase.

"The Mikado." Mrs. Awaga lowered her voice when she said it—did she bob slightly, or was that a fancy on Anna's part? "And our idols of stone are his ancestors.

"There are many bad Christians in America," she went on. "But your spirit is Christian. Japan's soul still pagan. My husband wish that it shall be changed. So we saw a great chance in this town of Bly. Then what happen?"

The Beneficent Society came smiling to praise us and ask that we should teach Japanese to the children in order that they should not forget mother tongue. That Beneficent Society select all textbooks. They are Buddhist and Shinto textbooks, explaining the divinity of our Emperors. We must use them or go without readers for our school. Then what happens next?"

Mrs. Awaga swept a delicate yellow hand toward the golden emblem of Buddha, just visible above the prune trees.

"But Buddhism and Shinto are so different," Anna objected. "The one teaches a sort of impersonal Nirvana, the other sticks to materialism and ancestor worship."

"In that temple," declared the little woman solemnly, "you behold—what do you Americans call it?—camouflage. Shinto stands behind the lotus flower. Mikado worship gets back behind all. And so you see my husband's congregation going across the street so that they see plenty gold when they pray."

iii

When Marietta Leacy returned from the East she hastened to the Bly farm and found Anna up and stirring. The bluff and hearty Marietta was full as ever of her brother's business.

"Dunc's getting to the age where he has to decide a great many things," she hinted significantly. "Of course bachelor's hall is all right, but Dunc's been going it alone too long."

What was the meaning of these veiled allusions? In a flash Anna saw a reason for her asparagus farmer's changed attitude. It wasn't entirely because he hated the Japanese that he had held aloof from her.

"I'd like to tell you all about it," Marietta went on in a guarded tone. "Poor Dunc takes things harder than you'd

think. But I've prodded him up and talked to him as man to man, and I believe I've got him to the point where he'll see it through."

Anna raised her eyebrows, inviting confidence. But that confidence never came. Marietta talked gayly on, painting humorous word pictures of New York's accumulated horrors and marvels. She was glad to be back on the island, she declared, and if Dunc took it into his head to turn her out at this late date she would build herself a bungalow behind the house and stay in the place where Nature intended she should live.

She left Anna pondering over a half-open secret. How had Marietta prodded Dunc up, and in whose behalf? How Anna hoped that his sister had picked out somebody good enough and intelligent enough really to help him! Did she wish that Dunc would love that hypothetical girl in return? Anna was too much of a woman for that.

Had she cared about anything, she might have experienced relief upon the day when Dunc Leacy slouched on the porch to announce that the picking was over for the season and his Hindu gang had gone its way. The threatening clouds had withdrawn and autumn was flooded with sunshine.

"You've had hard luck, I'll say," admitted Dunc that afternoon. "But there's no use wasting our time over *post mortems*. Farming, as I've said, is a worse gamble than Wall Street. You've got about half of the normal crop dried in the bins, and that's something—good, full fruit. These French prunes will run between forty-fifty and fifty-sixty to the pound. Too bad! It might have been a bumper crop!"

"I owe every pound of it to you," she assured him faintly.

"Pshaw! Let's forget it and try again next year. And say, Anna—"

He was sitting in his favorite place, which was the top

step of the porch, and he shuffled rather awkwardly before he went on:

"Anna, I've had myself all stirred up and going round lately. Maybe you've noticed it."

"You've seemed to be a little—a little abstracted," she admitted, curiosity battling with fear of what he might say.

"It's all right now, Anna," he admitted with a sheepish grin. "At least I think it is. I'll know in a few days."

"I'm so glad," she said, resolved not to force his confidence.

"I'll be going up to Oroville pretty soon," he continued in the same bashful vein. "I think I'll have news for you when I get back."

The arrival of Zudie and Kipps broke the thread, and Anna wondered just how he would have finished it. But he had told her plainly enough, and if she needed plainer telling his call on the morrow put her doubts into their final resting place.

Dunc came whirling up in his car, and Miss Sallie Bowen, the black-eyed little beauty from Oroville, occupied the seat beside him. She looked such a vivid young thing, with her black hair blowing and her dark eyes snapping. She glanced up and smiled her triumph even before his car had stopped by the veranda. How remarkably pretty she was! Beside her vitality Anna felt herself fading to a colorless mist.

Anna studied Miss Bowen as she seated herself in the box hammock, her look never far away from Dunc Leacy. No, she wasn't as pretty as Zudie. Or perhaps she was prettier, but she lacked distinction. She reminded Anna of the sweet, obvious faces you see on candy boxes. Her manner was proprietorial whenever she spoke of Dunc. She imitated his slang, criticized his table manners, gloried in his anecdotes, while Dunc sat self-conscious as any bridegroom-elect could possibly be.

"We're touring to Oroville to-morrow, aren't we, Dunc?" She gave him the full benefit of her lovely eyes.

"We sure are!" agreed Dunc with tremendous heartiness. Then he explained for Anna's information, "I'm looking over the irrigation system on Mr. Bowen's place."

"How long will you be gone?" asked Anna, and could have bitten her tongue for the question. But she had grown so to depend upon Dunc Leacy!

"Oh, a week will settle that job," declared Dunc with a fearful carelessness.

They shook hands at the edge of the porch. It was like bidding good-by to a honeymoon pair.

"I've pulled off those Hindus," he sang out from his car. "I guess Kipps can handle what prunes you'll find from now on."

Anna stood silently and watched the handsome roadster spin away. She wanted Dunc to have every good thing in the world, but behind her wish there was the thought that Marietta had not chosen with all the wisdom of her years.

CHAPTER XXIV: MR. HELMHOLTZ CALLS

i

WHEN Anna stood on her porch saying good-by to Dunc Leacy and the pretty Miss Bowen she resigned herself to the thought that this was farewell. Leacy had left her in his debt, and she was sorry for that; yet she was glad that she had known him and that the memory of his generous spirit would be with her for a long time.

She was too much of a woman not to feel a sting of shame that she had permitted herself to mistake his friendship for something that it was not. Had she been smaller spirited she might have harbored resentment against him for the emotions he had roused, to destroy at whim. After all, the kindness had been all on his side; that she remembered. She might have been more considerate of him and his prejudices. She realized that he had never quite forgiven her for going to Tazumi's dinner.

Anna would not admit that she was jealous of the black-eyed girl from Oroville. It was quite natural that Dunc should have preferred a young girl and a Californian. Anna pressed her lips a little tighter and hoped again that they would be happy as she went to review the wreck of her poor year.

A good half of her crop had been saved. This had been Dunc's estimate, and she had a fear that it had been too liberal.

She was out in the orchards that afternoon, gazing up at a few prunes which still clung to the twigs after the trees had had their last shaking. She was wondering why

these scattered treasures could not be profitably harvested, dolefully regarding her antiquated machinery, when Kipps, impersonating a cavalry officer as he sat astride the old brown horse, came clattering along the drive.

"Say, moms," he shouted as he brought his mount to a halt and slid off almost at her feet, "we can't do a thing with that junk, can we?"

"Not unless you can think of something, Kipps," she replied with a wan smile.

"We're a bunch of amachewers, that's what we are," he decided. "Dunc says that any professional can beat any amachewer at anything—just look at politics! Anyhow, I think something ought to be done about Aunt Zude."

"Aunt Zude?" Anna was startled by the boy's naïve reflection of her thoughts.

"She gets my goat," admitted Kipps. "She's lost all her pep. Every time I say anything to her she throws a duck fit, and I don't see what she's crying about all the time. I'll tell you what it is!"

Under other circumstances Anna would have laughed at his inspired expression.

"I'll bet two bits she's in love!" he shouted down the orchard rows.

"Hush!" Anna warned him. "What gives you that idea?"

"Well, she's about the right age," said Kipps. "And she's got all the symptoms—except poetry. I think Sid Footridge or somebody ought to be notified. I'm worried about Aunt Zude."

"You'd better worry about things you can understand," Anna told her bad, bad boy. "Did you go to the post office?"

"Sure," replied Kipps, nibbling a mildewed prune.

"Well, didn't you bring home anything?"

"Nothing much. Only a letter from Aunt Julia."

"Aunt Julia? How did you know that?"

"Easy! She makes a capital B so you can tell it a mile off. See that!"

Kipps brought out the conventional envelope to demonstrate Aunt Julia's capital B, but Anna hastened to read the letter, which was in Aunt Julia's best style:

My dearest Anna: Weeks since I have heard from you! I cannot *dare* to think what may have happened to you or to the children or to my darling, headstrong Judith out there in the wilds among godless people.

Why do you *never* write, my dear? Is there anything you are afraid to tell me? My nightly prayer is for you and for the heedless venture upon which you launched quite against my advice and that of Baron Tazumi. I do so hope you have taken the baron into your confidence and allowed him to guide your steps. He is a man of sweet and simple life, my dear, and a *noble example* of a race which has been much maligned.

I am snatching this moment from my work with the interchurch movement just to remind you of my existence. Anna, dear, don't be selfish. Write me one of your long, sweet letters and tell me all about yourself. And if evil has befallen you or yours, remember there is still a *Christian home* awaiting you here.

Affectionately,

JULIA E. STANNARD.

A letter from Aunt Julia had usually a blighting effect upon Anna, but to-day it exerted a certain stimulating influence. Whatever befell, she resolved, she should never return to Aunt Julia. But the artless impertinences of Kipps warned her plainly that something must be done about Zudie. She thought with a little bitterness how it had been her sister's fate, as well as hers, to drive love from the doorstep. Zudie, she knew, was spoiling her life for the lack of a man whom she could have by the saying

of a word. And Anna resolved that Zudie should say the word.

"Kipps," she commanded of the boy who stood beside her imperiling his digestion with damp prunes, "go find Henry Johnson and have him bring out the car."

"Can I go too, moms?" begged Kipps, scenting an expedition.

"Not this time, dear. I've something to do that won't interest you."

"Everything interests me," argued the young student of life, but he went just the same.

Ten minutes later Anna was rolling away toward the nearest telegraph station. She wasted little time over the yellow pad when she reached her destination; just a minute in which to scribble off a hurried message to Lieutenant Commander Sidney Footridge, in care of the ship, which, she felt sure, was still anchored in San Francisco Bay.

Now the message she sent called for a reply, and it was in dread of good news that Anna hovered near the telephone all that evening. She knew how Zudie would behave, once she suspected that destiny was being arranged for her. She would never forgive Anna for her lack of pride in sending a telegram asking Footridge in so many words to come and make his peace.

But there was no message that evening or the next day or the next. In vain Anna scanned belated copies of San Francisco dailies for news of the Pacific Fleet. Apparently it had already gone; yet she was puzzled at having no word from the telegraph office, where she had given instructions that she be notified if the message were not delivered.

The unhappy business of prunes filled her morning and took her thoughts away from Zudie's problem. Mr. Crane, the buyer, arrived early and went over to the storage shed

with most of the occupants of the Bly farm. He led the procession with Anna; Zudie and Kipps followed; Susan Skelley straggled in the rear, and Mr. Shimba, Esquire, appeared as by magic just as the party was filing into the shed. In a warm corner where the morning sun slanted through a cobwebby window Henry Johnson was found asleep, his curious face relaxed into an expression of perfect peace. A little green book lay open beside him, and when Anna picked it up she found it to be the life of John Stuart Mill—borrowed from her library.

"He takes it easy," smiled Mr. Crane, who was a fatherly little man with a figure that suggested a ripe melon under his waistcoat.

His remark woke the dreaming scholar, who scrambled to his feet and—for the first time on record—looked a trifle crestfallen.

"I have found my corner in Sabina," he informed the impromptu audience.

"I see you have," said Anna rather icily as she tucked the borrowed book under her elbow.

The Eurasian tramp shuffled away and permitted the shipper's comment: "That's a pretty good example of the labor we're getting nowadays."

Mr. Crane passed from bin to bin, picking up samples of dried fruit, squeezing them, smelling them and tossing them back again. He was a man with a prune sense developed to the *nth* power. Blindfolded, he could tell a forty-fifty from a fifty-sixty, distinguish between a French prune, an imperial and a *rôbe de sergeant*. Without referring to visible notes, he could give the week's quotations on the produce exchange.

"After all, it doesn't look like such a small crop," volunteered Zudie, her voice expressing forced optimism as the buyer went his rounds. "It looks like enough to keep every boarding house in the United States and Canada for a thousand years."

The amiable Mr. Crane sampled more fruit, smiled his fatherly smile and passed on to the next bin.

"They're A1, full, heavy prunes," Kipps contributed his opinion. "Dunc Leacy says so."

"Well, Dunc Leacy's judgment is pretty good," agreed Mr. Crane with a humorous wink at Anna.

He thrust his hands deep in his pockets and sauntered from one end of the storehouse to the other. Shimba remained by the door, his eyes blinking like black stars through their narrow slits.

"What do you think of that crop, Shimba?" asked the shipper.

"Pretty few," grunted Shimba. "Prenty more few than last year."

"I'll say you've been playing in hard luck this time, Mrs. Bly," decreed Mr. Crane, facing the proprietress of the farm. "You've got bully good fruit there"—his gesture indicating the contents of the storehouse—"just as good as can be raised in this district. Of course you can't raise the Santa Clara grade round here. But it's the best of its kind. I shouldn't wonder if you'd have put away a bumper harvest if it hadn't been for——"

"The strike!" Kipps cheerfully supplied the evil word.

"Between God and man," said Mr. Crane quite seriously, "the farmer's getting nothing but crow to pick any more."

"I've estimated"—Anna spoke in her most business like tone—"that we've gathered about half the normal crop."

"You're figuring a little high," replied the shipper. "Last year you took something like a hundred and sixty tons off this ranch—isn't that right, Shimba?"

"A hunner sixty-fo'," amended the Japanese farmer.

"Of course I'm not any automatic weighing machine, but I should estimate this lot at something less than sixty-five tons. Am I right, Shimba?"

"Yiss."

The black eyes glittered restlessly. If they expressed anything, it was not disappointment.

"I'll get my weighers to work as soon as they're sacked," Mr. Crane promised as the sad little procession filed out of the shed. "Maybe I'm wrong. I certainly hope so."

He had walked silently beside Anna as far as the porch before he said in a voice of confidence: "Mrs. Bly, there's something more than plain hard luck here, I shouldn't wonder."

"You mean——"

Anna's significant look brought a responsive nod from Mr. Crane.

"What did the Japs say they were striking for this time?"

"I couldn't get anything satisfactory out of Shimba. Mr. Oki says that the men were afraid of Mrs. Shimba's ghost out in the garage."

Crane laughed a short, dry laugh.

"That's a new one!"

"Shimba claims that they wouldn't work with my old-fashioned dipping apparatus."

"And he couldn't find any new men who would?"

"No. He was away every day after the strike, searching the labor market."

"He did most of his searching round the gambling dens in Lockport," replied Mr. Crane.

"Do you think——"

"I think almost anything, Mrs. Bly. You had a good farm here, and something's happened to turn it into a bad farm. Now I'll leave you to draw your own conclusions."

"If Shimba has conspired to ruin my crop," declared Anna, cold with rage, "I'll sue him for every cent he's got or ever will have."

"I wish you luck. I don't know how much money you've got behind you. If you're a rich woman and don't mind wasting a lot of your time, you might bring suit against a Jap and recover on it."

"I've made all sorts of improvements here," said Anna desperately. "Why, my share of the harvest won't begin to make up for what I've sunk in the place! I'm in debt now."

"I'm sorry, Mrs. Bly," he interrupted her as he held out his hand to say good afternoon. "Under such circumstances you wouldn't stand much show in a lawsuit, I'm afraid."

That afternoon Anna called Shimba to the house and denounced him with the fury of tortured nerves. She accused him of crookedness. She threatened him with lawsuit, imprisonment and exposure. Shimba's head sank lower and lower under the scourging of her tone. At last he fell on his knees and beat his forehead on the hall carpet.

"You kill me!" he implored. "You make me dead with knife! You think wrong for your good servant! Therefore kill me!"

"Get up!" she commanded, but Shimba remained stubbornly in his groveling attitude.

"I have made myself broke by one-half sharing in your crop this year. Laba condition so expensive, yet I pay all bills. Yet prune get rotten. Poor Shimba lose prenty cash. Yet his pretty boss call crook at him for doing so. Make me dead, please!"

"Haven't you worked deliberately to ruin my crop?" she accused him.

"Why should I done that?" he inquired, one pathetic eye cocked up at her from his debased position. "Even if I did not make loving thoughts at you, would I cut up my face to spite my head? Answer is no!"

"Get up!" she repeated, but Shimba crouched lower on the hall carpet.

"I expect to die here," he promised. "What else I do when my dear boss feel mean at me? I am bursted financially. Empty rice tub resides in my home. My nice wife must dishwash in Sacer-mento restaurant because every-

thing bursted from rotten crop. Please made me dead with knife!"

Anna left him where he knelt for the very good reason that she knew of no way to make him go. There was nobody on the farm capable of removing Shimba by force save Henry Johnson, and Henry, she suspected, was a pacifist.

iii

When she entered the house an hour later she was relieved to find that Shimba had gone. The grotesque earnestness of his prayer had had an effect upon her. Certainly if his motives were as simple as he had made them seem, he had lost more than she out of the sorry venture.

Was it a coincidence that Mr. Cyprian Helmholtz's car should have stopped before her veranda on the very afternoon when the sum of Anna's year had been laid before her? He was just as red-eyed and India-rubber pink as before, and he smoked the same type of freckled cigar that had sickened her upon the last interview with him.

"Well," he beamed cheerfully, "made a pretty rotten go of it, what? I sympathize with you though. More things can happen in farming than in the circus business. But I admire your pluck just the same. As I often tell my wife, women haven't got no business running a farm. One place for the man, another for the wife."

Anna endured all this because her mind was settling to a decision.

"I don't suppose you've cleared a cent after all this banging round, have you?" he jeered.

"When you count the improvements, I suppose I'm a little behind," she admitted. "But there are other years, Mr. Helmholtz."

"Sure there are other years," he conceded, but his voice spelled trouble ahead. "You've put in a new pumping system, I see, and built over the stables. It's a nice house

you've got here—put some money into that, didn't you?"

"A little," she confessed.

"Well, I'm for action. What'll you take for the farm just as she stands?"

"I haven't advertised it for sale," she said, but her tone was more hesitant than it had been upon previous declarations.

"My offer stands," he informed her briskly. "Thousand dollars an acre. More than that, I'll make a concession for your improvements. New pumping system, alterations, decorations on the house—"

Temptation fell over her like a sweet, soft cloud. Even under the spell, she paused to think of the man who might have advised her what to do.

"Who are your customers?" she asked faintly.

"Now that would be telling, wouldn't it, girlie?" He winked toward the uppermost branches of the prune trees.

"I've got to know before I part with this property," she insisted.

"Look here—this is between you and I, see? I haven't got no customer. I'm taking this little deal over on my own—get me? I don't intend the Japs'll hog all the farms round here. I'm not a rich man, understand, but I can raise the dough to take a flyer now and then. I've got some of my wife's money to invest, and I want to put it where it'll do the most good. There's a pear orchard at Walnut Grove, a Tokay vineyard at Lodi and this farm. Just a case of choose between with me."

Helmholtz's last statement put a new color into the situation. Vaguely she remembered something she had promised Dunc Leacy—Dunc Leacy, who should be no more to her than Cyprian Helmholtz himself. The farm had come to mean little else than chains and slavery. She knew that Helmholtz would drive a bargain, but in her heart she was eager for the chance to sell out to a white man and be free. She stood there pretending hesitation.

"How long would it take to complete the transaction?" she asked him.

Mr. Helmholtz held his freckled cigar between two large gold teeth and stood a while in thought.

"How long?" He gave her a red-eyed stare and repeated, "How long? Well, I'll tell you, Mrs. Bly. I been thinking of this deal quite a while. I even went over to the state house to look up the title. That's clean as a whistle. Nothing to do but to name your price practically."

"I haven't set a price," she demurred, fearful lest his wits should conquer hers.

"You've heard mine," he snapped. "It's about the top o' the market, the way things stand. You've got a little under forty acres in full-bearing trees. You've got fifteen in old ones that'll have to be taken out. That strawberry patch is a joke. But I'll lump the entire acreage at sixty thousand and allow you for improvements."

The philanthropist removed his cigar just an instant to beam the generosity of a golden heart.

"I'll—I'll have to talk it over with my sister," Anna temporized.

"Go ahead! How long will that take?"

"Couldn't I let you know some time this evening?"

"Sure! I tell you what you'd better do. Just ring me up at my house, will you? I'll stay home all evening. Better decide pretty quick, because the wife's anxious to invest, and she's pretty keen about that Lodi vineyard."

Cyprian Helmholtz bounded back into the front seat of his short-nosed car.

"Hear from you to-night!" he cried merrily, not taking the trouble to remove his hat as the car shot forward toward Anna's gate.

She stood dazzled in the dry sunshine. All her attention seemed to be centered on that gate, which she had had repaired and painted during the progress of improving her farm into bankruptcy. It glared at her like a symbol of

vanity and bad management. How she longed to pass out through those spotless posts, a free woman, never to return!

It was an unbeautiful fall day. A north wind had baked the ground and filled the valley with spectral whirlwinds of dust. Dust lay upon the withering orchards, covered the fences, polluted every spear of grass. And on the bosom of the winds Japanese boys in the village were flying their batwinged, barbaric kites.

A large kite, more violent of face and spiteful of movement than the others, soared over the Southern Pacific sheds, poised high above the Bly orchards and began to descend with the idiotic, aimless motion peculiar to a kite which has lost the brain that lies in its string.

A dust whirl took it up, then released it, to come lower and lower toward the Bly house, where it disappeared among the outhouses somewhere to the rear.

A moment later Kipps and Henry Johnson came sauntering round a corner of the house. Kipps was carrying the kite, a toy similar to the one John Matsu had flown. Its body was purple, its demon face streaked with red, and across its fan were printed those three familiar Japanese characters.

"Henry," asked Kipps in a voice that all could hear, "do you understand Japanese?"

"I claim that among my eleven languages," admitted the philosopher.

"Well, what does that say—those words written across the kite?"

"That is very simple," replied Henry Johnson. "It says, '*Nippon ichi*.'"

"What does that mean, Henry?"

"Freely translated, it might mean, 'Japanese Number One quality.' From that you might imagine it to say, 'Japan first!' or, a little more forcefully, '*Japan über alles*.'"

CHAPTER XXV: THE SALE

i

AT the thought of being free, of being rid of this incubus, Anna could have cried her joy to heaven. Hers was the feeling of the defeated general who—seeing hope over—surrenders his sword and dreams of a little peace. Then she thought of what Dunc Leacy had said so solemnly one day as he stood, one capable foot on the second step of her porch: “I’d just see that you stuck it out!”

How could she stick it out? What business of his was it now?

During the quiet hour after the children had been put to bed, and they were reading in the pretty sitting-room, Anna took the matter up with her sister.

“Zudie, I’ve another offer for the farm.”

“Who?” Zudie looked up from her magazine.

“Helmholtz. A thousand an acre.”

“That isn’t another offer then,” decreed Zudie. “He’s mentioned that before.”

“But he’s willing to reimburse us for the improvements.”

Zudie sat thinking. Wind and sun had improved her beauty, though her eyes were a little sad these days.

“Anna,” she said at last, “I’ve so wanted to stick it out. It seemed to be a solution for everything, but it’s just another one of those things that look well on paper.

“Of course we’ve gone at it like a pair of rank amateurs, but I don’t think it’s that entirely. Failure seems to be in the air. I don’t mind telling you now that I felt failure the first day we came on the place. It’s always easy to pass the blame up to the Japanese. The sort of white people who

don't like to work and call Hoover an Englishman because the pro-German papers say so, are only too glad to put the blame for their own shiftlessness on the Japanese. But under all that there's something—something——”

Zudie paused, struggling for a definition.

“Well, there's something going on,” she said, “that isn't wholesome for us. You can't blame the Japanese for the bugs that ate our strawberries, but you can blame them for the crates that were refused by the shippers. They seem friendly, these Japanese. They always smile. But in spite of that it's plain that they don't want us in the district.”

“If our farm is worth a thousand an acre to Helmholtz, why isn't it worth as much to us?” asked Anna.

“That I can't see,” admitted Zudie. “But it has been quite plain from the first that Helmholtz wants the farm. Probably it's because a man with a business education can put things through where we can't.”

“We could never find white men to work the farm,” Anna admitted despairingly.

“I've searched the employment bureaus over,” said Zudie. “There were plenty of big white loafers to laugh in my face, but nobody to work. I've never told you the things I went through in Sacramento and Stockton, begging and imploring white men to work at any price. Right in the midst of the harvest season great muscular louts stood with their hands in their pockets, gathered in knots to talk about a world revolution and to insult women as they passed. Afternoon performances at the movie houses were packed with able-bodied men. Out round Lodi the I. W. W. delegates were nailing up signs demanding five dollars a day for an eight-hour day and seventy-five cents an hour for overtime. Work seems to have gone out of fashion. What's happening to our country, Ann?”

There came no answer to the question over which many a wiser head than Zudie's has ached in vain.

“If it's a matter of principle——” faltered Anna.

"If we were rich enough," Zudie broke in, "we might hold on. We could leave the farm to the birds and the bugs until labor sobered up. But that would be a horrible waste, too, because the world needs food, even though it has to pay a pawnbroker's interest for it."

"Shall we sell?" Anna looked her sister guiltily in the face.

"Sixty thousand dollars is a lot of money," replied Zudie, her eyes lowered.

"Less than a year ago I preferred the farm, and now—"

"We could go to Los Angeles and build bungalows with the money," said Zudie. "We could live in one of them and rent the others. Then I could get something to do."

Anna, from her place on the davenport, could see the despairing look in her sister's eyes. She reached out a slender arm and said, "Come here, honey!"

Obedient as a little girl, Zudie came to be petted and comforted by the only mother she had known since early childhood.

"Zude, you sweet, foolish thing," said Anna softly as she stroked the aureole of honey-colored hair, "life would be simple for you if you'd only let it be. For just a word you could marry and be happy."

"No," protested the lips tight pressed against the protecting arm. "I'd never leave you, Ann—even if I wanted to."

"But you want to. You know you do."

"Not now, dear. I've got over that. Besides—"

Because of the long silence Anna prompted, "Besides what, Zude?"

"I saw it in the papers yesterday. His squadron sails for the Philippines Friday."

The three-party telephone in the hall trilled twice—the call of decision!

"I'll go," said Zudie, coming to her feet.

Anna heard the receiver click from its hook and a few sharp questions, ending in, "Yes, she's here."

"It's Mr. Helmholtz asking for you," announced Zudie when she came back.

In her advance from the couch to the telephone Anna made her decision.

"Have you been thinking it over?" asked the buzzing voice from afar.

"Yes, Mr. Helmholtz."

"Well, what's the good word?"

"We've decided not to sell."

"That's good! What's the idea?"

"We're asking eleven hundred an acre, Mr. Helmholtz."

"You're a good business woman, after all. I'll say so! And just to show that I'm a sport I'll take you up on that."

"You mean to say——"

"It's pretty steep, but I guess I can stand the racket. How about improvements?"

Anna hesitated and heard Zudie prompting from the hall door, "Say ten thousand!"

"We have put in something over ten thousand dollars, Mr. Helmholtz," said Anna.

A pause.

"All right. That'll be seventy-six thousand in all," came his decisive tone. "Never mind about the deed. I'll have all the papers drawn up early in the morning."

"Shall I call at your office?" asked Anna, her voice fluttering slightly.

"Oh, never mind. I'll blow round your way at about ten with a deed and a notary public and a check book. Good night, Mrs. Bly."

"Good night."

Anna went giddily back to the sitting-room. The first sight to greet her eyes was Zudie's bright head buried in her arms under the glare of the table lamp.

All this happened on Tuesday night. Shortly before ten on Wednesday morning Mr. Cyprian Helmholtz stepped from his weather-beaten roadster to the Bly porch. He removed neither his hat nor his cigar as—speaking round the corner of the latter—he explained that the colorless human being at his side was Mr. Crass, a notary public, whom he had brought along in order to facilitate matters.

Mr. Helmholtz snapped the new-made deed out of his pocket, scarcely giving the seller time to read its typewritten phrases. It was plain to see that the legal transfer was being made to Cyprian Helmholtz and Gloria Helmholtz, of Sacramento. Lawyers' English had always bored Anna, but she made a brave show at taking it all in. Zudie it was who studied the document carefully ere affixing her signature on the line marked "Witness," while the notary invoked divine aid in the tone of an alarm clock. Susan Skelley's wayward scrawl rambled across the line below. Then the seal was fixed, golden wafers licked and everything done according to that spirit of Hoyle that haunts the state supreme court.

"And now," said Mr. Helmholtz, slapping the marbled covers of his check book on Anna's desk with a briskness suggesting finality, "the amount's seventy-six thousand. Right?"

Nobody denied the correctness of the figures set flourishingly upon the slip of paper which he tore from its perforations and handed over to Anna Bly. The check was drawn on the Nippon Bank of Sacramento. Anna was too excited to see any significance in this—her only feeling was one of gladness. She felt weak and vague, much as she had on that fearful evening when Zudie had called her out of the orchards.

Helmholtz seemed to think a little speech necessary upon the conclusion of this stroke of business. He took his

cigar out of his mouth and said in a tone which approached politeness: "You sure have made a good deal, Mrs. Bly. It'll be a long time before you'll find customers like me and the wife, ready to waive everything and pay a gilt-edge price, hands down, no questions asked. But that's the way I like to do business."

"Quick sales and small profits our motto," Zudie came in with something of her old-time sarcasm.

"You've got it, young lady," agreed Helmholtz. "Take your time about vacating. I'm in no hurry, and the wife ain't either."

"We'll be out in a week," cried Anna, glorying at the thought of quick release.

"You are prompt, I'll say! And you put up a game fight here, ladies. Of course, farming ain't no business for Easterners to try—especially city folks. But you did give 'em a run for their money. Well, happy days, ladies!"

He had scarcely taken his deed and his notary away with him when Anna hurried to her room and began changing her clothes.

"I can't believe it!" said Zudie, who had followed her upstairs. "Seventy-six thousand dollars! Ann, we're rich!"

"I'm going to Sacramento," declared Anna out of her trancelike state. "I want to get his check in the bank as soon as I can."

"Moms, can't I go too?" was Kipps' plea, according to custom, as she went down toward the car.

"No, dear. You stay home and help Zudie with the packing."

"What's the idea?" he was calling after her as Henry Johnson shifted the gears and started the car.

Every mile of her speed-defying drive to Sacramento—Henry had been ordered to spare no gasoline, and he was capable of brilliant achievements under pressure—Anna could feel the precious scrap of paper crackling in her hand

bag. Freedom from worry, new life, a start all over again! Kipps could be sent to school in some town where the conditions were suitable. Nan could have children of her own kind to play with. But where?

For a few miles of that reckless drive Anna reflected on the last pious letter from Aunt Julia. After all, with a little income of her own Anna would occupy a less humiliating position than she had heretofore in the Stannard household. But what about Zudie? New York under the former conditions would be just as dangerous for her as it had been on that wintry night when they made their bold decision.

Seventy-six thousand dollars! In that magic number there lay some solution to her problem. Possibly Zudie's plan for the purchase of Los Angeles real estate would prove the practical solution.

As her car rolled silently into the suburbs of the state capital Anna had about decided against a dreary future in Aunt Julia's religious home. The possibility of another failure in Los Angeles plagued her a little. Then again she felt the crinkling paper in her hand bag. Seventy-six thousand.

iii

When Henry slowed down before the glassy front of her bank she was almost hysterical with fear lest the receiving teller would refuse Helmholtz's check for one perverse reason or another.

But the man at the window, expert in the teller's arts, examined the signature with the noncommittal eye of a hardened poker player. He scribbled the sum in her pass book and handed it back with an amiable comment on the weather. That was finished!

Anna, who had been living on her nerves these last few days, had no sooner taken the pass book in her hand than

she realized how weak she was. Susan Skelley's sour warning, "Bed's the place for ye," was ringing in her ears. The California sunlight, beating through the windows into the glassy room, affected her with nausea. She had scarcely strength to weave her way through the crowd of farmers and to the door; and there she was stopped by a big man in a new blue suit. He came swinging in and all but knocked her down in his blithe haste toward the teller's window.

"Anna!"

She glanced up and beheld Dunc Leacy looking very handsome and urban in his citified clothes. A childish resentment overcame her with the thought that he had never dressed like that for her. The room was swimming round, but even then she could read in his eyes a warmth and an enthusiasm she had not seen there these many weeks.

"Anna," he persisted, taking her by an arm, "you're all in!"

"I—I didn't know you'd come back," she told him weakly, and leaned against a rack of counter checks to save her uncertain knees.

"Just about an hour ago," he told her in his changed, happy voice. "I've brought back some bully news, Anna."

"Let's sit down," she implored, almost in a whisper.

He led her to a yellow oak bench by the wall, and as soon as he was seated beside her he demanded, "Anna, what have you been doing to yourself?"

"Nothing, Dunc. I've come in on business, and I—I—"

"Can't Susan Skelley or Zudie or Kipps make you stay in bed? I no sooner get off the ranch than you're up and doing something foolish."

His scolding words were expressed in a tone so comforting that Anna had a feeling of being lifted out of danger under his strong protection. In that happy instant she was unable to believe that this man upon whom she

had learned to lean had gone forever out of her life--that he had stolen this moment for her.

"I've jumped over the rope," he was telling her in his happy tone. "It was a grind, I tell you, but I'm through. And you'll congratulate me, won't you, Anna?"

She closed her eyes. Try as she would she couldn't congratulate him.

"Anna," he implored, "let me take you home. You oughtn't to be batting round this way."

"I'll be all right in a minute," she told him. "I've had rather a hard week settling things up."

"Why didn't you wait for me to get back?" he asked. "You don't know anything about prunes."

"It wasn't prunes," she said suddenly, disobeying her intuition. "Dunc, I've sold the farm."

"Sold it!"

She saw his jaw drop and his capable hand grasping an arm of the bench.

"Sold it! When the deuce did you do that?"

"This morning. He wanted to close right away—he wouldn't wait—he brought the deed right over—I've—I've just deposited his check."

"Whose check?"

The hardness that had come into his voice worked like a stimulant upon her tired senses. Her faintness passed away and she answered in a tone as cold as his, "Helmholtz."

"I see." Leacy's body relaxed and his hands fell to his knees. "I see. So you did sell out to the Japs, after all."

She sat silently trying to meet his stare. What was he implying now?

"Dunc, I don't know what you mean," she told him, her anger rising to meet his. "It had nothing to do with the Japanese. The deed was made out to Helmholtz and his wife."

"Oh, yes!" He gave a miserable chuckle before the puzzling comment: "Helmholtz is building an empire."

"Do you mean to say there's been some trick?" she faltered.

"Some trick! What's the use of explaining, now that it's too late?"

"Dunc, I don't like the way you're talking to me. You've got to tell me——"

"Well then, you have transferred your farm to Cyprian Helmholtz. Helmholtz—to-day or to-morrow or next week—will transfer it to some nice little Japanese child born in California. The Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company has furnished the very dollars that Helmholtz wrote out to you on his check."

"Do you really mean that, Dunc?" she asked, feeling a new alarm.

"I mean it as nearly as I can mean anything I don't know. I believe—and there are plenty to agree with me—that K. Sato, head of the Natural Energy, 'represents' the Imperial Japanese Government in America. You've handed your farm over to the Mikado, so that there won't be any more white spots in the yellow belt that Japan has founded, stocked and managed in the Sacramento Valley. But," he added with a dry laugh, "I don't suppose one of us could prove it."

Anna looked away from him—looked through the window into the glaring streets of Sacramento. She hoped that Dunc Leacy would leave her to her tortured thoughts, but when she glanced round he was still there, gazing at her with eyes that showed nothing more than pity.

"You didn't know what you did," he said. "That's the way they've caught so many."

"I knew exactly what I did," she replied coming angrily to her feet.

"I'm sorry I pulled that rough stuff," he apologized. "You see, I just got my own money this morning, and I was

starting for your farm with the idea of making a buying proposition of my own."

She left him standing there and hurried through the open door toward her little car at the curb.

CHAPTER XXVI: THE HEAVENS REPLY

i

EARLY in the afternoon of the same day the Brand sisters were busy about the house in the first scattered preparations for departure when a marvel appeared in the sky. It was such a miracle as—even so recently as fifteen years ago—would have caused towns to vomit forth their inhabitants and simple folk to fall in prayer upon their knees.

But the year 1920, being sated with miracles, scarcely looks up at the vision of great ribbed wings, scarcely remarks upon a dragon's roar filling the vaulted blue. And so it was in Bly. A mechanical bird, mighty as the fabled roc, passed overhead; and the folk of a race which, less than three score and ten years ago, had bowed down before Perry's black ships because they advanced into their harbor without sails, now went about their business from grocery to garage, from garage to Buddhist temple.

Just another aëroplane—Japan had as good, and plenty of them.

But this aëroplane was peculiar in its behavior; that much even the busy Mr. Akagashi had to admit. It seemed to have Bly on its mind, for it circled over the cluttered streets, coming lower and lower in an ever-narrowing spiral. It seemed bent upon tearing away the gilt-topped spire of the new Buddhist temple and of perching on the roof of Mr. Awaga's jerry-built church.

The noise of its propeller was abominable to the ear. Just above the main street it hurdled an invisible barrier and rose again to take its curious flight over the Bly tract.

Kipps was the first to herald the monster to the women of the farmhouse.

"Gee, mom's!" he shrieked, racing headlong toward the porch. "Ain't she a whale?"

"Ain't she a whale!" echoed little Nan, covering her head as she ran.

Every inhabitant of the place stood stockstill, faces upturned, mouths open, while the monster performed its remarkable antics so close above the prune trees that the topmost branches bent earthward as if under the stress of a tornado. It came down almost to a level with the trees, whirred dizzily upward, then descended once more to circle the barn and perform acrobatic feats about the chicken yard, where white wings were flapping and hysterical hens running back and forth in a frenzy of panic. Rodger, the old brown horse, had been dozing against the fence, but at sight of the marvel he leaped two bars as gracefully as a young thoroughbred and galloped snorting away through Shimba's settlement.

Through the doomsday racket Susan Skelley's shrill voice could be heard in malediction, but it was all over as quickly as it had begun. It looked for an instant as if the aëroplane would carry away the Bly chimney, but it cleared that obstacle, leaped two hundred feet and hurled itself toward the south. It seemed to be swallowed up behind the lacy barricade of trees. The sound of propellers ceased abruptly.

"I think they're in trouble," said Anna.

"They ought to be," agreed Zudie.

"It's the wrath o' God come to finish th' job," snarled Susan Skelley.

"Oh, mom's!" shouted Kipps. "They've pancaked right down on the field beyond Akagashi's store."

He was already running toward the scene of trouble, and Anna, seeing no other member of her household about to take the initiative, hastened after him.

In the midst of Mr. Akagashi's stubble field Anna saw the aëroplane standing like a great, glorious dragon fly, unscathed to all appearances. A flock of Japanese children came running cross-lots from the settlement. They were gathering in knots round the short blue fusilage, gawking up at two aviators who were then scrambling stiffly out of the cockpit.

The first man to descend was disguised from head to foot in the baggy garments of his trade. After him came a second man in a weatherproof coat and leather helmet. While the first aviator set himself at once to a businesslike inspection of the machine, the second showed complete indifference to the perilous contrivance that had brought him there. He removed his helmet, tossed it back in the fusilage and stood undoing the complicated buttons of his coat.

Anna Bly watched this spectacle at a dignified distance. Kipps had crawled under the barbed wire, eager to be in at the death, if death there were. He had elbowed to the forefront of the spectators and had planted himself less than two feet away from the man with the weatherproof overcoat. Anna was about to call him back.

ii

The man had just shed his big coat and revealed himself in a navy-blue uniform. At the instant of revelation he looked down at Kipps, uttered one ferocious roar and picked the boy up in his arms. Supporting Kipps on his shoulder, he came striding out of the mob, and Anna could hear a treble voice, pitched to the news key of the town crier as it proclaimed: "Hey, moms, it's Sid Footridge! Look here, moms! It's Sid!"

"Well, I got here, you see," said Sid, grinning from ear to ear as he put Kipps down.

"I see you did," she replied, astonished beyond any show of surprise.

"Kipps," suggested Footridge, "do you think you could run over to the machine and ask Billy Walker—he's the man in the munition maker's disguise—to pass me out my cap?"

Kipps had barely time to scamper across the field when Footridge was apologizing.

"I hope I didn't scare you to death."

"Almost," Anna confessed.

"It was the only way I could come," the naval officer was explaining rapidly. "I've been away on target practice—got back this morning and found your telegram. I've got just two days of shore leave, Anna, and I sail at dawn Friday."

"It was wonderful for you to come, Sid," she told him, her heart filled with thanksgiving.

"It was something of a stunt," he agreed. "I saw that it was too late for railroad or touring car, so I just naturally went over to the Marina and hired a plane. The short way's the air way—forty minutes from the Marina to Bly."

"Wasn't it rather expensive, Sid?" she asked.

"Not so very—something less than a month's pay. I just arranged for the one way, because, Anna——"

He leaned against the fence post, and his healthy, homely face was very wistful as he said: "Well, Anna, there wouldn't be room for her in the plane, and if she doesn't go back with me I don't much care what happens."

"What's been going on between you two children?" asked Anna, to whom Zudie had been more and more of a puzzle.

"The same thing. She wants me to quit the Navy for her, Anna. Can't you see how I stand?"

"I think she's changed her mind, Sid," said Anna very softly.

"Has she?" His face became radiant for a moment. "What's changed it?"

Her eyes turned back toward her farm and wandered over the orchard rows, tired and sere from the year's fruition.

"All this," she whispered, her hand sweeping in a gesture that covered her unsuccessful enterprise. "She thinks as I do now. Yours is the most glorious profession of all—to keep a band of steel tight round my country."

"You didn't think so a year ago," he interrupted.

"No," said Anna. Then she added with a sad, experienced smile, "But that was a year ago."

"Do you think she'll take me now?" he taxed her, keen eyes eager under shaggy brows.

"Let me talk to her, Sid."

She left Footridge to settle with his missing cap as she hurried into the house as though fate depended upon the turn of a second. She found Zudie bending over a trunk in her bedroom at the head of the stairs.

"Sid Footridge has come to see you," she announced after closing the door.

Zudie stood up. Her face was flushed with leaning over, and it showed no expression of surprise.

"Where is he?" she asked quietly.

"He was getting his hat out of an aëroplane when I saw him last," replied Anna.

"What does he want?"

"He wants to see you, Zude. He flew all the way over just to talk to you before he goes." Then noting the hesitancy on her sister's part: "You're going to be good to him, aren't you, Zude?"

Zudie made no reply to this, but went over to the mirror to smooth her hair. The act meant nothing more than that Zudie was any woman about to talk to any man. Presently heavy footsteps were heard on the veranda floor. Without a glance for her anxious sister, Zudie went down the stairs.

In her rôle of benevolent spy Anna listened at the head of the stairs, but gained little satisfaction. Only the buzz-

buzz of two voices, male and female, then long silences, then another buzz-buzz. Finally she heard footsteps on the boards and the clack of feminine heels on the steps.

From another post at the bedroom window she saw them walking single file down the path toward the river. She had no glimpse of their faces, but by the expression of their backs she was forced to the sorry conclusion that they had been quarreling again.

For a gentleman too busy to come by any slower route than the air way, Lieutenant Commander Footridge certainly wasted a great deal of time that afternoon. The screen of willows seemed to have swallowed up the enigmatic couple. Anna, as detached as one swinging between heaven and earth, waited an anxious hour. Then her heart stood still at the sound of footsteps bounding across the veranda and up the stairs. What had brought Zudie back in undignified haste?

Looking nervously through the doorway, she was disappointed to find that it was not Zudie but Kipps. The boy was all out of breath, every hair of his sun-bleached head bristling with excitement.

"Moms," he shouted, "why is Sid Footridge sittin' so long on a log with Zudie?"

"Hush!" his mother cautioned him.

"Well, why is he?" persisted Kipps, lowering his voice several octaves.

"He wants to talk to her, I suppose."

"He isn't sayin' a darned word."

"No?"

"He's kissin' her like all outdoors."

"You shouldn't spy on people, Kipps," said his mother, restraining her impulse to shout Amen!

"I wasn't spyin'. Isn't that the place where I set my rabbit traps?"

"You'd better stay in the house a while and help me pack," she suggested.

"All right."

He leaped impetuously to his task and began clattering among shoe trees, only to interrupt himself with the remark: "I don't see why he keeps on kissin' her when she doesn't like it."

"How do you know she doesn't like it?" Anna conceded.

"Well, if she did she wouldn't keep on cryin', would she?"

"Come here, Kipps!" she entreated her son. Kneeling beside an open trunk her attitude was almost prayerful.

"What's the idea?" he asked, but his question was smothered in a motherly embrace.

"Kiss me!" she demanded.

"Well, I'll be darned!" said Kipps.

iii

The sun was slanting over the trees when the couple came back up the river path. They were no longer enigmatic, and they were no longer walking single file. Was it the gold of a California sun that carried them in a nimbus of light? Sid Footridge's homely face seemed glorified to a heroic beauty. His look told the story as plainly as though he had shouted it over woods and fields.

It was then that Anna cast aside all reserve to rush forward to meet them on the path. Zudie clung to her and cried and cried. There was no need of telling anything now. But when Sid Footridge advanced to plant a resounding kiss upon the lips of his sister-in-law-elect the manful Kipps again put in his word.

"Can you beat it?" he asked the empty heavens, and strode disgustedly away.

The romantic act ended, the three of them sat on the veranda to settle the practical details of getting married.

"Zudie thinks," grinned Footridge—and he seemed quite

unable to control that obsessing grin—"that she ought to stick round until things are settled."

"With me?" cried Anna. "Now don't you two be foolish again! Everything's settled as far as I'm concerned. I'll be out of here in a week."

"Ann!" Zudie objected. "What will you do? You won't have any—"

"Don't be silly! Haven't I Susan?"

"And I sail Friday morning," broke in Sid's refrain.

"You'll be married this very afternoon," decided Anna. "When is the next direct steamer for Manila?"

"The Pacific Mail. The *Colusa* sails Saturday at one o'clock."

"Could you engage passage so late?" Anna demurred.

"I'll pull every wire on the coast for it," declared the bridegroom-elect.

"Oh, Anna!" was all Zudie could say.

Somewhere above the stubble fields to the south the throb of Billy Walker's aëroplane could be heard. Gradually it rose above the trees and vanished among the clouds.

"We can't have that boat to honeymoon in," said Footridge. "Now let's try and settle about a parson. I'm not much of an expert, but we ought to be able to dig up a good one at Sacramento."

"You'd be wasting a good deal of time," declared Anna in a tone which caused the lovers to look round. "You'll do one thing for me, won't you, Sid?"

"Anna"—he reached out and caught her hands in his—"I'd take my heart out and skin it alive if you asked me to."

"It's not much—and I hope you won't think me sentimental. But, Sid—would you mind being married right here in Bly?"

"Why, Ann!" interposed her sister. "There's no minister here—except the Reverend Professor Awaga."

"That's exactly the one I mean," replied Anna. "He's an ordained minister of the gospel."

"You don't mean a Jap?" roared Footridge.

"Yes. He and his wife are Christians. They may not be of our color or denomination, but they are as good people as I have ever met. They're having an awful time, Sid—and somehow I should like to see the little preacher perform the ceremony. It would make me feel better toward—toward a lot of things we're putting behind us."

"I don't care if he's a Siamese Mormon!" grinned Footridge, and so it was decided.

iv

The ceremony in the shabby little Methodist church had been of no practical convenience, that was sure, for it had necessitated a racing performance on the part of Henry Johnson in order to carry the bride-elect as far as Sacramento for the license. But it satisfied something in Anna's heart—put a drop of sweet into her bitterness for the yellow town of Bly.

The Oriental wireless telephone seemed to have spread the glad tidings, for there was already a throng of Japanese—children in the majority—gaping blankly as the bridal party—Anna, Zudie, Sid, Susan Skelley, Kipps and Nan—left the automobile to enter the church door. Henry Johnson shambled over from the farm and lurked in the vestibule. Heads of wiry black hair were clustered together at the entrance, elfin-bright eyes peered into the bleak interior as the long-haired ones went up the aisle to stand before the weather-beaten pulpit, which Mrs. Awaga had decorated for the occasion with flowers from her garden.

It was a gaunt and ugly room. On the stained walls hung a few religious lithographs, partially concealing cracks in the plaster—illustrations of the good Samaritan and of the resurrection, with texts in Japanese. On wooden tags,

hung in a long row above the cheap wainscoting, were the names of Mrs. Awaga's Sunday-school scholars, each written in the blotchy characters of Nippon.

The place was so bare, so tragic in its simplicity! Instead of pews, long rows of kitchen chairs stood waiting Awaga's dwindling congregation. The ecclesiastical scroll-work on a cottage organ in the corner did its bit toward proclaiming poverty.

Anna felt the pity of it all as she stood aside and heard the little yellow man in the long frock coat struggling with the English of the marriage ceremony. Once or twice he had to go back and read a passage over again in order that the contracting couple might understand sufficiently to make the response. Came another pause at the line, "With this ring I thee wed." Sid Footridge blushed purple. The headlong fellow had forgotten that detail!

The halt was just for an instant, for Anna Bly pulled a band from her finger and dropped it into the bridegroom's palm. It was her wedding ring.

"Let us pray," said the little minister, closing his book and raising his short arms.

The words from his high-pitched voice came sonorous and devout, but they were quite indistinguishable. Then Anna understood. His command of English had failed. He was praying in Japanese.

What a prayer might that have been! Prayer to an Almighty who has set the gulf of race, wider than any ocean, between peoples equally human yet equally unable to understand! Prayer of Asia to the Christ of Asia for some answer to the yearnings of two alien worlds held apart by a law as immutable as that which keeps the planets in their courses!

At last the little preacher raised his head and ceased to pray. The silence of infinity filled the church for just an instant.

"I wish you all can be very happy!" said the Reverend

Professor Awaga, holding out his tiny hand and chuckling the easy chuckle of his race.

"Thank you, parson," said Footridge. "You couldn't have done a better job with a pipe organ and a vested choir."

"Oh, we not very much to offer," he apologized, bobbing and persisting in his chuckle.

The rest was a daze to Anna. She had an impression of Zudie's beloved arms round her neck and Zudie's voice caressing her. Somewhere out by the door, too, she came to herself to hear Sid Footridge whisper: "Say, Anna, I've been trying to slip ten bucks to that parson, and he won't take it. Can you beat it? Says the ceremony's his wedding present!"

"Take her away, Sid," she begged. "I can't stand it much longer."

And then she saw the bridal couple stepping into her pretty car and heard the self-starter snarl metallically as Henry Johnson put his heel upon it. Zudie was waving at her and blowing kisses through the window, but Anna stood immovable, watching the car roll smoothly down the asphalt road. Zudie had slipped out of her life.

Long after the bridal car had faded among barns and fences down the road she stood, her dry eyes fixed upon the spot where last she had seen it.

"Mrs. Bly, please!"

Anna looked round and saw Mrs. Awaga standing at her elbow, her body bent politely.

"Mrs. Bly," insisted the gentle voice, "my husband should like to ask you. Could you stay with us to supper? It is very poor, but we should so enjoy having you!"

CHAPTER XXVII: THE LAST NIGHT

i

ANNA spent her last evening in Bly with the courageous, pitiful little couple who kept house in a sort of apartment in the back of the Japanese Methodist Church. There was a box of a kitchen where Mrs. Awaga prepared the meals. In the living-room the Awagas ate, studied and—at least so Anna suspected—slept. Through a half-open door she could see a wide brass bed wherein reposed three little Awagas, their black and wiry heads lying all in a row, suggesting so many Japanese dolls tucked in for the night.

The living-room was a jumble of odds and ends which looked like relics from every secondhand store in Sacramento. The articles of furniture were all shabby and all in a bad period of the Victorian or a little later. There was a marble-topped table with awful Egyptian legs, a whatnot of the design known to our grandfathers as "rustic," two tassel-edged rockers which creaked on patent springs. The carpet, which had once been flowered, was worn to the woof in gray footpaths from the kitchen to the dining table and from the side door to the kitchen.

This room displayed the ugliest of everything European. It gave the impression of a people who had lost their own beautiful art and were utterly confused by the æsthetics of another race. Nowhere was there any trace of the gracious, lovely things of Japan, save in the corner there was a framed diploma which Mr. Awaga explained he had earned upon his graduation from Waseda University. The pictures on the wall were mostly poor engravings. There was a portrait of Theodore Roosevelt; an enlarged photograph

showing numerous little yellow men in long frock coats; one of those maudlin colored prints, so dear to our ancestors, depicting a sirupy child playing with a kitten.

"We've been getting our things together for a long time," explained Mrs. Awaga, and her air betrayed pride in having made a home so thoroughly consistent with her American ideals.

"Yiss," agreed the Reverend Professor Awaga, "many we bring all way from San Frisco."

All this time Mrs. Awaga was trotting along the worn footpath between kitchen and dining table.

"We going to try give you American supper," smiled the hostess. "My husband has killed our family chicken in your honor."

"How delightful!" cried Anna, yet feeling that the joke about the chicken was no joke. "I hope you're not avoiding Japanese food because of me. I love it."

"You are kind to say so," declared Mrs. Awaga. "But I am sure no American could like it as well. You eat much meat to make you so tall and beautiful."

When the meal was on the table it proved to be American enough, but rather flavorless and poor. The cooking was like the furniture—an attempt at a misunderstood ideal. The rice, of course, was perfect, because to any Japanese it is a sin to spoil rice. But the potatoes were heavy, the tea acrid and the chicken indifferently fried.

"I know that we do not understand it," admitted little Mrs. Awaga in tiny despair.

"Oh, it's delicious," lied Anna like a perfect guest.

"But we so wanted to see you before you go away."

"So much," Mr. Awaga supplied. "You are been so kind."

This was toward the end of their meal while they were indulging in preserves and baker's bread.

"I can't tell you how much I've admired the way you've worked here," said Anna. "And against such odds too. If

I ever come back I'll attend your church and do everything I can to keep it going."

"Shank you!" said Mr. Awaga with a dreary hiss.

The sharp black eyes of the little couple exchanged quick glances before Mrs. Awaga said: "We shall not be here, I am afraid, when you might come back."

"What? Are you going too?"

"Yiss."

Mr. Awaga said the word in a voice that was very solemn.

"But where are you going?"

"Where the Lord sent us," said he, and looked again at his wife.

"I do not suppose you realize, Mrs. Bly," explained the woman, speaking for her inarticulate husband, "what goes on behind the scene. You Americans see in my race just one problem, and you are not aware of the difficulties between us. Much politics has happened in Bly, and it is decide that we should go. The Buddhist temple has arranged that for us."

"But, Mrs. Awaga," exclaimed Anna, "surely the Buddhists have no authority over your church!"

"No," she smiled. "But they have influence over those who have."

"But your church is controlled by an American organization!"

"So it seem," said the little schoolma'am. "Good American ministers got us here. To them we are much obliged for salary."

A look round the poor interior gave a hint at the size of that salary.

"But words can be spoken into powerful ears. We have not made friendship to the Buddhists."

"How in the world can that affect the Methodists?" asked Anna, quite puzzled.

"Ah, how easy it is to start wrong tales about us!"

Buddhists have many tongues, and they clatter smoothly with Christians. Then there are Christians and Christians. Mr. Oki is Christian of one kind. See how the Beneficent Society can make sweet with the Methodist church, promising many converts!

"So stories get started. They say us to be mischief-makers, unable to keep our congregation because of bad tongues. They even blame us with death of Mrs. Shimba, saying that we poisoned her poor brain against her husband. Every misfortune in Bly is dropped on our church door. Therefore Honorable Bishop come to tell us that we shall be removed."

"We got such many things together here," declared little Awaga, blinking at the ugly collection which represented home to him.

"But I could go to the bishop," Anna volunteered. "If I told him how heroically you have worked and how they've plotted against you—"

"No." There was all the mystery of Asia in the woman's eyes as she said that. "Honorable Bishop must be approached at another way."

"But how?"

"He is good man," she said, "but he love Japanese too much to behold their politics. What Beneficent Society tells him he believe. Therefore Beneficent Society is the only way—"

"I'll go to them then," declared Anna. "Just tell me where to go, whom I shall see."

Again that rapid look between husband and wife. Mrs. Awaga hesitated an instant to ask him a question in Japanese. He replied hastily and returned his anxious gaze to Anna's face.

"You should see K. Sato," said the little woman solemnly, lingering over the name of a hidden power.

"K. Sato!" She might as well have been sent upon a mission to the Mikado. "Does any one ever see K. Sato?"

"It could be done, I think," said Mrs. Awaga. "If you go to Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company in San Francisco. He is president. They have great offices there."

"But would anything I could say have any effect on Sato?"

"I could not say. But he much broader in mind than others of my countrymen."

ii

Anna's house seemed too quiet that night when she returned to it. She had a feeling that not only Zudie but her children had deserted her. Haunted by this obsession, she crept up to their room and opened the door a crack, to be heartened at sight of the two yellow heads, pillowled as peacefully as Mrs. Awaga's dolls had been. She felt now that her responsibilities were simplified, even at so high a cost. Her future, such as it was, lay clear before her.

Somewhere in the culinary regions downstairs she could hear the clatter of kitchenware, and by the sound she realized that Susan Skelley had gone about the work of packing without a thought of union hours or overtime charges. Bless Susan's dour old heart! Above the clangor of pots and pans Anna recognized her monotonous scolding tone, and then the heavier notes of an earnest platform speaker. And from the commingled sounds she knew that Susan had put Henry Johnson to work.

Anna tiptoed downstairs, resolved to forget herself in the preparations for retreat. But as she wandered from room to room she found that Susan had performed miracles during the few hours. Pictures had been taken from the walls, wrapped in newspapers and stacked in piles; books had been laid away in their packing cases; curtains had been taken down, rugs rolled up; pieces of family bric-a-

brac again reposed in the barrels which had brought them there.

Anna sat in the ordered chaos, thinking, thinking. She was glad that she had parted with Zudie in a flame of impulse, accomplished it all in haste while the courage was with her. Had she lingered another day she might have weakened, might have begged her little sister to stay and help her fight it out. And Zudie, she knew, would have stayed.

In this first hour of loneliness Anna realized how much she had leaned upon that sprightly girl for every practical advice. Anna wasn't practical. Now the fact stared her in the face. She had no plans for investing the small fortune which had come to her so easily; she had no plans beyond Saturday, when she would say good-by to Zudie, possibly for always. Manila was such a world away!

Life is an oddly managed thing, so dependent upon the whim of governments and boards of directors and bodies of men acting as proxies for fate. Anna thought of the little Awagas, devoted and humble, doing their duty as they saw it. Fate in the form of a yellow man named Sato had decided that these poor pawns were worth taking off the board. There was neither right nor wrong in this. It was merely Sato's move—that was all. But were these proxies of fate incapable of compassion? Were they also automata, like their victims, to be moved only by some stronger hand from above?

Anna had reached the determination that she would see K. Sato and do her poor best for the Awagas, when she heard shuffling feet in the hall and beheld Henry Johnson, his long face streaked with soot from his labors with a stove pipe, bowing elegantly at the door.

"Madam," he began, stepping nimbly into his chosen rôle of Greek chorus, "every alpha has its omega, isn't it so? The twilight of the gods has arrived; Wotan's palace tumbles and Valhalla erupts to the Valkyr song of this

Miss Skelley, who is the only living person able to talk me off my feet. When do we turn over the property, Mrs. Bly?"

"Not until the fifteenth," she said; then added, "I'm going to-morrow afternoon."

"Ah"—the gesture of his loosely knit arm seemed to include the entire house—"but you are not intending to surrender all this to the heathen!"

"The furniture? I wanted to talk to you about that, Henry. I don't want to come back—if I can help it." She looked earnestly into the living paradox which was his face before she asked, "I wonder if I can trust you, Henry?"

"Do you think you can?" he responded quite cheerfully.

"You're the only man about the place, and you could help me a great deal if you'd stay and see that everything is put in storage properly."

"That would be a rare chance," he said thoughtfully, "for me to steal a number of things."

"You wouldn't do that!"

The hybrid regarded her speculatively; a look of pathetic humor had come over his queer face.

"No, I wouldn't. Mrs. Bly, it's a curious coincidence, but I've come to-night to restore something which I have already stolen from you!"

"Why, Henry!"

Anna knew not whether to be amused or alarmed when the Eurasian began fumbling among the folds of his faded blue sweater, to bring out an object which had been swelling the garment like a hidden tumor.

It was a little desk clock, a frivolous gilt object, all ringed round with flowers and Cupids. Anna could not restrain her mirth at sight of a wedding present of the sort well lost to any tastefully arranged house.

"If you were going to steal," she laughed, "why did you pick on that?"

"Now there's a problem," declared Henry, holding the

ornate object up by its ring. "It's really rather ugly, isn't it?"

"Maybe it is," agreed Anna, who had never considered it one way or the other. To her a clock was a clock.

"Motives for crimes are a study for the psychologist," he continued, tilting his head critically toward the object under discussion. "Possibly I desired something to keep time by. One of the failures of my life has been a lack of punctuality. I have never carried a watch, largely because the price has been prohibitive. Possibly too"—here he squinted his queer eyes into the face of the clock—"possibly my motives were merely sordid. In a tight corner I might sell it for that mathematically perfect thing—a square meal. But I don't think that was it entirely."

He paused and swung the clock on his long forefinger as his eyes wandered toward Anna.

"Possibly I took it instinctively, because it reminded me a little of you."

"I like that!" she cried, remembering his comment on its ugliness.

"Not æsthetically perhaps," he resumed. "But it is such a symbol. It has not been built for use, but for decoration. Originally designed for some boudoir of ormolu, French brocade and painted flower panels, here it has been ticking its life away in the midst of a prune orchard. Temperamentally, too, it is significant. It keeps very poor time. Either its wheels are running away with its hands or it stops dead and refuses all human comfort."

"It is a very imperfect thing," she admitted, quite without humor.

"Isn't it? And that is why I regard it with so much affection."

He was about to set it down on the table beside her when she stayed him with a gesture and a smile.

"I think you'd better keep it, Henry," she said.

"Thank you."

With irreproachable dignity he restored the clock to its hiding place under his sweater. Then he began bowing himself out of the room.

"You can trust me to carry out your orders," was his final declaration ere he ambled down the hall toward his Spartan quarters in the rear.

CHAPTER XXVIII: THE VANISHING SATO

i

IT was on Monday morning that Anna Bly set out from her obscure hotel to find the man who, through the carven door of Buddha, might say the word to save a Christian minister to his dwindling congregation. She had applied at the offices of the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company on Saturday just after Zudie's boat had sailed from a Pacific Mail dock. But the place had been closed on the afternoon of rest. Anna had spent a blank, bleak Sunday in a Geary Street boarding house which, deceiving the passer-by with the sign "Hotel," offered the depressing hospitality of musty carpets and stringy curtains. The place was called the Royalmere.

"The Royal Smear it is, an' that's the truth," Susan Skelley had proclaimed upon her first sniff of the dank interior.

Anna had passed Friday night and Saturday morning with the new-made bride. At dawn on Friday Sid Footridge's squadron had faded into the fog beyond the narrows light. They are always unsatisfactory things, these hours of waiting to say good-by. Trivialities obtrude themselves; the mind is occupied with the practical job of getting away. How many a sweet word has been left unspoken because a steamer trunk refuses to close! The press of detail crushes out sentiment and philosophy—and it is often better so.

Only once had Zudie spoken her heart.

"I never thought I could be a navy wife," she had said. "I used to wonder how you ever managed with Alec—always moving from port to port, always waiting for him

to come ashore. But I know now, Anna, how you felt."

"It's the waiting that makes us love them," Anna had answered quietly.

But the pain of a second parting had been over in an instant. Then whistles brayed, the deck was a-flutter with handkerchiefs and officious little tugs hauled the dignified monster out into the stream. That chapter was closed for Anna; and she was glad when Monday came and she could finish her one remaining business with the little town of Bly.

She found the offices of the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company prosperously established on the tenth floor of a Market Street skyscraper. The main office which she entered expressed itself in terms of wealth from polished mahogany counters to gilt-lettered windows. In and out of many corridors and anterooms smartly dressed Japanese clerks, their wiry mustaches cropped and their hair combed back in fierce black pompadours, were scurrying about the business of Natural Energy.

In the large room beyond could be glimpsed the glories of a cashier's department, outfitted like a national bank with many quick and clever yellow faces behind brass-grilled windows. To all appearances the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company was—as sensational papers had hinted—a powerful machine with the wealth of a government behind it.

Anna stood for an instant confused by the prevalent bustle. The Natural Energy had no end of business that morning. Peasant Japanese, wandering with that lost expression peculiar to the city-visiting yokel, would be addressed in their native tongue by the Natural Energy's brisk representatives; then they would be personally conducted from counter to counter to linger over typewritten documents in blue covers. A few of them would be led away through swinging doors handsomely lettered in *hiragana*, the flowing shorthand of Japan. Stout, middle-aged

sons of Nippon, obviously representing the commercial class, asked authoritative questions of the amiable clerks behind the longest counter.

Several American typists and a few Japanese girls, the latter slim and tidy in American shirt waists, clicked busily at the keys.

The sweetest Japanese in the world stood behind a desk labeled "Information," and when Anna approached him his smile revealed all but his wisdom teeth, and he writhed in excruciating politeness.

"Do you think it would be possible for me to see Mr. Sato?" she asked.

"Oh, madam!" He sipped twice and blinked his flat lids. "That would be entirely difficult this time."

"But I have come here on rather important business."

"So sorry! Could you tell me that business so I could take it up?"

His voice bubbled into a series of giggles, so amiable was his mood.

"I'll have to talk to Mr. Sato," she insisted.

"So sorry we must know the nature," he trilled. "We could give such advice from our various departments. Possibly it is rear estate you wish to discuss?"

"No, not real estate."

"Legar matter?"

"No, not legal matter. I know he's a very busy man, but I think he'll give me a moment."

"Shank you!" declared the sweetest Japanese in the world. "I see what I can."

He dodged behind a glass screen and was gone a long time. Other members of his information bureau were busy on both ends of the counter, giving advice in Japanese to a throng of Natural Energy's customers. At last the sweet little man brought out a very thin Japanese with a mournful gray mustache.

"Who you wish see?" asked the latest arrival, his manner

markedly contrasting with the saccharine air of his inferior.

"I should like to speak to Mr. Sato," she began all over.

"Eh!" The red-rimmed eyes glared at her through brilliant spectacles. "I am second vice-president. What you wish say?"

"I am engaged in farming at Bly," she decided to tell him. "I have come with a message from one of his friends there."

"Which friend?"

"A Mr. Awaga—he's the Japanese clergyman there, you know."

"Eh! What he can do for Mr. Awaga?"

"It is confidential business—I must speak directly to Mr. Sato."

"Eh!"

Without another word of encouragement the melancholy person turned on his heel and vanished behind the screen.

Anna's wait this time was longer than before. Her feet grew weary of standing in one place. She leaned on the counter and tried to amuse herself with guessing just what the stenographers could be putting down so earnestly. Once she lost patience and appealed to the sweetest Japanese in the world, who looked up from the confidential advice he was doling out to his countrymen.

"Prerry soon somebody tell," he sipped, and resumed his discussion.

Finally a handsome yellow boy with a face as smooth as an egg made his appearance from behind the magic screen. When she saw him Anna had the impression that the second vice-president had gone back to his desk and told the office boy to pounce out at her in half an hour. Her impression was justified when the youth approached her.

"Mr. Sato out," he cooed.

"Do you think I could make an appointment with him for to-morrow?" she asked, already sufficiently discouraged.

"I see," smiled the lad, and vanished into the unknown.

Dunc Leacy had once told Anna that a Japanese never says no, and in this instance the graceful national habit was prettily illustrated. She drooped against the counter, growing more satisfied as time passed that the Japanese office boy had gone back to pitch pennies—or whatever it is that Japanese office boys pitch in moments of leisure.

She had just settled herself upon a bench, determined to bide her time, when a huge, red-faced American in the gray cutaway coat and wide-brimmed hat of a minor statesman came swinging in and presented himself noisily at the information desk.

"I want to see Sato," he rumbled as he glared savagely and chewed a rag of a cigar.

"Which name you say?" asked the sweetest Japanese in the world.

"Senator Ogensbury."

Anna looked up with renewed curiosity at the name of the state senator who—while assuming indignation against Japanese encroachments—had managed to blockade every Asiatic land law so far suggested.

The sweetest little man behind the desk fairly melted into sirup before so mighty a person.

"You come this way, senator!" he sipped. "Mr. Sato see you this door, sair."

The little guide, bowing like a major-domo, opened the gate and showed the distinguished visitor to a heavy door in the rear.

All of which goes to show that you can find anybody if you only know how.

Anna did not permit the office boy to stain his soul with another mendacity. She rose and had started toward the exit when she recognized a face which was welcome to her

for the first time since she had known it. Hurrying busily among the minor officials was the elegant Mr. Oki.

"Ah, Mrs. Bly!" he came rushing toward her, showing the smile that had always reminded Anna of so much cocoa butter.

"You're in this office too," she said. "How charming!"

"I became appointed here only last week," he explained with the air of one too poor to deserve such a reward. "I am now second assistant treasurer. Is it not nice offices we got here?"

"Wonderful!" she declared. "They seem to express unlimited power."

"Quite so." He paused for an instant as though taking time to swallow her remark. "We are going at everything on grand scale. That is secret of success, is it not, Mrs. Bly?"

"The very secret," she agreed.

"And we have wonderful plans for improvement in all California. We shall show them what blessings Japanese can make for America."

"Is that a threat, Mr. Oki?" she asked.

He giggled gleefully.

"I wish I could learn jokes like you do! Something we can never know right is American jokes. What brought you so far in the air this afternoon?"

"I have been trying to see Mr. Sato," she admitted. "Perhaps you could help me."

"Oh, how I wish it! But this Mr. Sato is long time out of San Francisco. We cannot tell when to expect him back sometime."

She overlooked this pleasant chasm between fact and fiction.

"Ah, Mrs. Bly," he cooed, "that is very happy news we hear about your sister's wedding."

"News travels fast, doesn't it?" she asked, annoyed at this man's continual prying into her affairs.

"Has my news traveled to you, Mrs. Bly?"

"Your news?"

Inwardly she resented his coupling of his own news with Zudie's.

"I, too, am soon to be married."

"How delightful!" chimed Anna, repressing any note of sarcasm which might have struggled to be heard. "And whom have you made lucky?"

"Miss Otisuki—Miss Genevieve Otisuki."

In a flash Anna recalled the wealthy land speculator's daughter who had played Chopin and Beethoven for her in her father's Piedmont villa; she remembered the girl's insistence that she would never marry a Japanese. Also she recalled how Mr. Oki had mentioned Mr. Otisuki as a *narakin*—a vulgar fellow, suddenly rich and swollen with bourgeois pride.

"Even for so sweet and charming a girl," she could not help saying, "it must be a great advance in the world to marry so much above her station."

Oki waited for that to sink in, then his smile was broader than ever.

"Oh, no," he admitted. "So much money is equal to nobility anywhere."

"Weren't the great daimios of Japan taught to despise money?" she argued.

"Yes. But why?" His bright eyes snapped with the question. "They got plenty of it—swords in those days—plows in this. If you got money sufficiently behind you, then nobility crops up in the world. Same Japan, same everywhere."

"Your country must be changing," she said thoughtfully as she bade him good-by.

CHAPTER XXIX: A NOTE AND AN ANSWER

i

NEXT morning Anna received a night letter from her Aunt Julia in New York, and the message seemed to settle everything in an aimless sort of way. Mrs. Stannard had always considered the California venture queer. To Aunt Julia the queer was unforgivable; not to be queer had been the fixed determination of her sixty years. Anna had written to her on the day she sold the farm, and she had sent a telegram to announce Zudie's marriage to Sid Footridge. That in itself must have struck the eminently conventional Mrs. Stannard as sufficiently queer, for her reply was delayed until the Tuesday which followed Anna's visit to the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company.

The night letter was urgent and of double length; and though it expressed disapproval at the queerness of Zudie, it melted into affectionate entreaties for Anna to bring the children home and put Kipps back in the only school that Aunt Julia thought fit for one of her blood. There would be room for them all in the big house, the message said.

Anna read it to the close, and realizing that there was no house sufficiently large to shelter her and Aunt Julia in comfort, she was about to word an affectionate refusal when a second consideration decided her to show the night letter to Susan Skelley.

"New York's the place," decided Susan. "An' a bad day it was whin ye took th' childer to live among them Chinee. Ef ye stay here another week they'll git ye yet, an' it's truth I'm tellin' ye. I've no childer of me own, Mrs. Bly, an' ef I had they'd go no further west than

Third Avenoo, an' that but wance a year. Yer Aunt Julia's got sinse in 'er head, though few wud think ut."

Susan Skelley cast the deciding vote for Anna. Life in Aunt Julia's house would be far from an easy thing. It was better than the prune ranch—that was all. To endure Aunt Julia meant surrendering all personality, taking the crumbs from a grudging table, sinking to the level of a poor relation. But there were Kipps and Nan to be thought of.

Under Aunt Julia's guidance Anna could manage so that her boy should be educated; her daughter destined, Anna was sure, to great beauty, would have her rightful place in the world. To become a hanger-on in a set where once she had lived on a lavish scale frightened her for just an instant.

Then she dressed herself and prepared to seek out a railroad ticket office.

"Where you going, moms?" asked a treble voice, as Kipps plunged at her out of the dimness of the hall.

"I'm going to the ticket office. Want to come along?"

"I'll say I do!" shouted the boy, who had chafed like a caged animal under the confinement of the hotel. "But say, moms, what do you want at a ticket office?"

"We're all going back to New York."

"When?"

"As soon as we can get accommodations."

This kept Kipps silent until they had gone down in the elevator and were crossing the cheaply ornamental lobby.

"What are we going back for?" he took up the theme as soon as they had reached a street corner.

"You must go to school again," she told him, and had a feeling of being on the defensive.

"Where are we going to live?" the cross-examiner persisted as the Geary Street car had stopped to take them in.

"With Aunt Julia."

"Zowie!"

"Don't you want to live with Aunt Julia?" his mother asked, but Kipps was then too busy getting her safely aboard the car to answer.

When they had settled in their seats he took a deep breath to express his candid opinion.

"Moms, I can't see this Aunt Julia stuff a-tall."

However Kipps felt about it, Anna had made up her mind, and in this the salesman at the ticket office was helpful. He could get them nothing on the Overland Limited inside a week; possibly there would be a chance for a drawing-room and berth on the slower Pacific Limited leaving Thursday at one o'clock. He was the very flower of ticket agents, a young man who could pass before a rack the length of a city block and never hesitate until he had picked out the right ticket; a young man who could hold a telephone receiver between his shoulder and the lobe of his left ear while he barked mysterious numbers into the mouthpiece and never missed a number, despite the fact that other and equally important ticket agents were walking on his toes, gouging him in the ribs and repeating comic anecdotes into his disengaged ear.

"For Thursday afternoon, madam," announced the prodigy at last as he dropped several squares of cardboard and wisps of paper into an envelope.

While Anna was counting out her money Kipps stood with his inquisitive gray eyes peering just over the edge of the counter.

"Gee!" he muttered. "If I had that much dough I'd buy an airplane."

There was little left to do but wait for Thursday, but Anna filled the first hours of intervening time with further efforts to see Mr. Sato. To approach him, as at first she had tried, by means of a call at his office seemed now quite hopeless. Indeed, she repeated her attempt Tuesday after-

noon, and was again smoothly passed from clerk to clerk. She failed to reach as high a point as the vice-president this time. The sweetest Japanese in the world almost wept when he told her that Mr. Sato was not in.

Anna was too sensible a woman to harbor resentment against the busy establishment. True, she had no reason to believe that Sato was not in. Should the influential State Senator Ogensbury appear again, she had no doubt that he would be shown straight to Sato's door.

"He out!" seemed to be the only words of English Mr. Sato's clerk could say.

She heard this phrase often enough during her second visit to his headquarters. Later on, when at her hotel telephone she tried the simple ruse of calling him by wire, again she was told "He out!" in many degrees of politeness.

She was unable to take offense at any of this. Why should so important a man as K. Sato bother with a woman on an entirely unknown mission? If his assistants lied amiably, even that was but an act of diplomatic mendacity borrowed from the white man's books of ethics. Any man of affairs on a busy day would have shielded himself from interruption just as Sato had done; and Sato had a state-wide reputation for being the most unapproachable of his breed.

She clung doggedly to her program, however, not because she hoped to come face to face with Sato, but because she wanted to feel that she had tried to do something in behalf of the poor Awagas.

Finally Anna relinquished the vocal method and considered other means. Influence, of course, will take you anywhere if you have the right sort. But what influence could Anna summon to open Sato's closed door? She thought once of Tazumi. He undoubtedly could have touched the right button, but Tazumi was out of the question. At last she hit upon direct action, which often succeeds where cir-

cumlocution fails. She wrote a letter to K. Sato, President of the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company.

"My dear Mr. Sato: I am writing to beg a favor. Will you give me a little time that I may explain a matter affecting the success and happiness of two of your own people? I realize that you are a tremendously busy man, and it is only because I feel that great injustice might come with delay in this case that I am anxious to see you as soon as possible.

"My business—which I could not fully explain to your subordinates—concerns S. Awaga, pastor of the Japanese church at Bly. I feel assured that I can appeal to your fair-mindedness, regardless of your faith, because you must sympathize with this claim on the part of a humble countryman of yours; and his only offense, I assure you, consists in his unselfish sacrifice to his convictions.

"Hoping that I may be permitted to talk with you, however briefly—"

Anna wrote this on the second-grade stationery of the Royalmere, signed, sealed and addressed it and sent it away with the favor of a special-delivery stamp.

The post box had scarcely swallowed up her letter when she was tempted to break a Federal law and fish it out again at the end of a hatpin. She had a picture of her plea being delivered to an undersecretary of the Natural Energy Fruit and Land Company to be passed up the line, possibly as far as the desk of the second vice-president. There it would flutter to the wastebasket. Or possibly the egg-faced office boy opened the mail; in which case her letter would drop in the first wastebasket instead of the sixth or seventh.

She wrote this letter on Tuesday night. At five o'clock Wednesday afternoon she was just coming into the shabby foyer of the Royalmere when a woman behind the desk

leaned over and said, "Gentleman in the parlor for you, Mrs. Bly."

"Oh! A gentleman, did you say?"

"Japanese gentleman."

It was too easy to draw a conclusion from this announcement. Sato, the mysterious and powerful, had harkened to her humble plea and sent an envoy or come in person!

iii

The sitting-room, a plush-upholstered dungeon on the second floor, held a solitary figure when Anna entered its dimly lighted depths. In the shadowy atmosphere details were obscured, but Anna knew that the neat little person sitting so upright beside the lace curtains was a Japanese. He rose and bowed ceremoniously as she approached.

Baron Tazumi! And he had taken her hand in his!

Anna released his cold, silken fingers, and it was an effort to be civil to this man, always courteous, always helpful, whom she had resolved never to see again. His manner, however, was so friendly and natural, so full of his former thoughtfulness for her that her qualms disappeared almost upon his first word.

"I am sorry to be a little late," he was saying in the voice of one who has kept an appointment tardily. "It is almost impossible to be punctual at this time of day, when Market Street is so crowded."

She had no reason for being impolite, but do what she could, she was unable to reply. She seated herself stupidly as he laid his gloves and walking stick beside his pearl-gray hat.

"I understand that little Zudie is married," he said as soon as he had taken a chair. "I was immensely pleased to hear that. A fine chap, Footridge! A little narrow perhaps, but who isn't? And did you get a good price for your farm?"

"A very good price," said Anna, finding her voice. "The terms were better than I expected."

"I am very glad of that. I was afraid your inexperience might lead you into a bad bargain. They are very sharp people, these land speculators."

"I had a great deal of trouble with my Japanese farmer," she went so far as to inform him. "His inefficiency on my behalf and efficiency on his own made it so that I had to sell to save myself."

"My dear Mrs. Bly! I am wretchedly sorry to hear that. You should have let us know."

Since when had Baron Tazumi become "us"?

"And in the matter of these Awagas, Mrs. Bly," he went smoothly on, "I think you will agree with me that many very estimable people can make trouble for a whole community."

"Baron Tazumi," Anna broke in, a suspicion having obtruded itself, "have you come to me as a representative of the Natural Energy Company?"

"I shall never come to you, Anna-san, except as a friend," he replied, his voice losing its overtone of politeness and reverting to an earnest bass.

"I confess I can't quite understand," admitted Anna. "There is no reason for you to know that I am here. I wrote a letter to Mr. Sato, asking if he would talk to me about the Awagas."

"My dear Anna-san," cut in Tazumi, "would it please you better to talk to him?"

"Frankly," she said, "it would please me better."

"Very well," answered Baron Tazumi, "then you have your wish. You are talking to him now."

He leaned a little forward as though to make himself plainer as he added: "I am K. Sato."

CHAPTER XXX: HENRY TELLS HER WHY

i

IT was Thursday morning, and the Bly trunks having just been sent away, there was nothing to do but wait for a quarter past eleven, when the taxi would come to take the little family to the ferry.

"What are you doing, Kipps?" asked Anna, who had been seated at the window trying to read by the light which sifted through imitation Nottingham lace.

"Fixing my necktie," replied the he-boy, his angular elbows flopping before the mirror.

"Please don't!" she begged. "I spent half an hour tying it for you."

"There never was a woman born," declared the sage, "who knew how to tie a necktie. See, moms! You don't do it by making a noose and sticking the end through. You pass it over and round like that."

Kipps illustrated his lecture by twisting the strip of silk into his own idea of fashion, which, though no better than his mother's, suited Kipps.

He had on a very new suit of clothes and a pair of bright tan shoes which squeaked as he walked. Altogether he looked the model boy.

"I don't like this idea of dolling up every day," he complained. "The minute we start East I begin looking like a Molly. I think it's awful efeminine."

"It's what?" asked Anna, truly concerned.

"Efeminine," he repeated.

"Where do you pick up such words?"

"Oh, I read a great deal," he informed her loftily as he shook out his new gray coat with pleats in the back and began putting it on. After this was done he slouched on the window sill and continued his interrogation.

"What's the big idea about our going East, anyhow?"

"Do you prefer California, dear?" she asked rather plaintively.

"Who wouldn't?"

"But Aunt Julia wants to put you in school, Kipps."

"Aunt Julia! She'd put me in dresses like a girl if she had her way. Aw, moms! I'm pretty near grown up anyway. I've got about all the education a man needs for a practical business life. I could get a fine opening with Dunc Leacy if I wanted to strike out for myself."

"Would you strike out and leave your mother, Kipps?"

"You bet I wouldn't!" he replied after what was undoubtedly an inward struggle. "And that's why I'm following along. Somebody's got to look out for you, moms."

"Come here and kiss me!"

The affectionate demonstration was cut off by a parrot call from Susan Skelley demanding to know why Kipps had opened another hand bag and what it was he had spilled across Nan's new shoes.

"Susan never gives me a chance to concentrate on anything," complained the young genius as he passed into the room beyond and engaged himself in a violent argument with his sister.

The hour dragged slowly. Through the Royalmere's shoddy curtains Anna could look down into Geary Street and study the ways of city-living Japanese. Most of the store fronts were lettered in flowing *kana* or the more elegant characters borrowed from China centuries ago. Across the way were several boarding houses with urbane Japanese passing in and out. A little beyond these high-

stooped houses a low door was marked "Baths" in English above bold brush strokes in the island language.

From her place at the window she could see a little cobbler busily at work shaping soles at a complicated electric machine, while his partner rat-tatted patiently by the door. Japanese women passed by, trundling gocarts or carrying children against their shoulders, their bodies swayed back by the weight of their young. A Japanese laundry wagon backed against the curb. It bore an English name—chosen perhaps to disguise its Oriental proprietorship. At a corner farther uptown a Japanese bookseller was dressing his window with tinted lithographs of American beauties in the deminude.

From her height Anna could study the brown faces. Those of the women were as unwrinkled as though they had been enameled with porcelain; those of the men were puckered into serious lines. They gave the appearance of men worked until everything but a lust for work had been driven from their characters—men born of tired parents to a heritage of hard ambition. They smiled mechanically, they bowed mechanically. Behind them stood the invisible slave driver, goading them on to reclaim their souls from an age-long bondage.

"Who are the great of the earth?" again the woman asked, gazing like a disembodied spirit down upon a scene as busy as any in the little town which she had quit because Japan had conquered it. "If singleness of purpose is great, then Japan is great. If patience to endure is admirable, then Japan is admirable. The will to power—"

The phrase struck cold upon her heart. Prussia had worshiped that thought before her man-made Valhalla fell and the houses of the gods were steeped in death's twilight.

Busily in and out, under the picturesque signs which she could not read, dapper business men, smartly clad young women, dumpy matrons came and went. Every face was

marked with the expressionless expression which spelled "ambition." Ambition for what?

At a second-story window across the street a child of three appeared and peeped with elfin black eyes down upon a problem equally insoluble to child or man, yellow or white. The huge, swollen face of a Japanese woman came into view beside the inquisitive head. For an instant the mother soul seemed to shine out through the mask as her heavy shoulders drooped and her eyes were turned toward the little face.

A telephone bell rang out in Anna's narrow room, urging her away from her thoughts.

"Mr. Johnson calling," announced the hotel operator.

Anna went down to the reception room to meet Henry Johnson, who, faithful to his trust, had come to report. As he rose before her he looked starved and prophetic in his shabby plaid suit and Bohemian necktie.

"Omega has arrived," he said in a deep voice.

"It isn't quite finished," she told him, attempting to brighten his long, solemn face.

"It is the longest letter in the alphabet," he replied. "According to Milton's inaccurate account, it took Lucifer longer than union hours to tumble from heaven to hell. Rome took her time about going to pieces, you will remember. Nothing stops all at once. And in my case I have required a number of days to settle up your affairs on the ranch."

Henry's long fingers went probing into a greasy vest pocket to bring out various folded papers.

"Your storage warehouse receipt," he announced, presenting the first one, "and a receipt for your automobile. I left it for sale, mentioning the price which you required. Your trunks you received, I suppose?"

"Thank you, Henry. They came Saturday."

"I am surprised. It all goes to show that I might succeed if only I had sufficient will power to keep my atten-

tion on one thing for a long time. Do you know, Mrs. Bly, that the months I spent on your farm represented the longest time I have ever stayed in one place since I was twenty-five years old?"

She motioned him to a chair and sat beside the anomaly for whom she had learned to feel an affectionate interest.

"Why don't you get the habit, Henry?"

"You mean sticking at things?" He laughed bitterly. "Sticking is not meant for a thing like me. Staying in one place indicates a healthy mind—I am a diseased condition, Mrs. Bly. Two good stocks, never intended to interbreed, have come together in my poor soul and body. I am like a mongrel attached to a tin can—I try to escape it by running."

"Henry," began Anna impulsively, feeling that she might not see him again, "you have always been so bitter against intermarriage. Do you remember what you promised me a few weeks ago?"

"The day you found me making merry with Japanese newspapers?"

"Yes. You said you would tell me why——"

"Why I hate myself," Henry supplied.

"Was your mother Japanese, Henry?"

"No, the Japanese was my father," he said, a rough note coming into his voice.

"But your name's American."

"What's in a name?" He snapped his skinny fingers over the Shakespearean question. "Henry Johnson is a ready-to-wear name—easy to get, easy to cast aside. My father? Oh, probably you have read his name a hundred times in the newspapers. You would recognize it if I told you—which I shall not do."

"You've never explained anything about yourself," she reminded him.

"Why explain the inexplicable?" he asked, but suddenly the habitual look of sarcastic humor fell away from the

warring features and his eyes were filled with savage pathos as he said, "My mother—she was an American. Do you really wish to know how I came into being?"

"So much!" replied Anna.

"I'll tell you about her. It's rather a story—Euripides might have made quite a decent tragedy out of my mother; but people don't tear out their eyes nowadays. They tear out their hearts and get a polite obituary in the morning papers. I'll leave my mother's story with you. It's all I have to give in return for your kindness."

iii

The oddly matched features were stern as granite as he went on, "My mother's been dead a long time now. She's just another forgotten episode back in the Meiji epoch. My father, I think, still says prayers to her tablet. It's a delicate attention, isn't it, to apologize to a block of wood after the damage is done?

"He's an intellectual man, my father, and he belongs to what in France they would call the small nobility. He was one of the first Japanese of position to drop his prejudice and go in for money-making. The old nobility, you know, used to regard merchants as something lower than pawnbrokers. They say in Japan to-day that our last gentleman died when General Nogi committed seppuku, which you inaccurately call *hara-kiri*. But my father was very radical for a nobleman. He came to Boston nearly forty years ago, representing the silk industry; and there he met my mother.

"In Boston, you know, they are very fair-minded on the subject of race. My father became popular, and he met this pretty lady, whose parents had been abolitionists; they had filled her with romance about the dark-skinned races. The marriage was quite a natural thing; wasn't it?

"I remember my mother very slightly, because she died when I was a small boy. I have an impression of a colorless, sad woman who wore her Japanese clothes—well, you know how Japanese women look when they try to dress like Americans! It must have been a dog's life. She seemed always to have an apologetic look, because it's impossible for the white woman to carry chains gracefully as the Japanese women do.

"I don't want to give the impression that my father is a bad man. He merely lived the life which society required of him. Had he taken my mother with him to dinner parties he would have been regarded as insane. Public dinners are for gentlemen and for women hired to entertain them. Here in America you would not invite ladies to a prize fight, would you? It was no fault of my father's that the social system demanded that his wife should be left at home.

"It was many years after my mother died that I began to realize just what had killed her. It was what in Tokio they call matrimonial felicity and in Boston they call neglect.

"His social obligations kept him away from home most of the time. As ladies of quality were not allowed to appear at large public dinners, his feminine companions were naturally of the geisha class. If my mother had been head of her own household, as she would have been in America, it might not have been so trying. But there was always my honorable grandmother to rule the place with a rod of iron.

"It was the rod of iron and the cord of silk that killed my mother. Through the thin partitions of my bedroom I used to hear her crying in the night. Once I slid away the panel and crept in to her, and I heard her praying to a Christian God that she might die before another morning. My grandmother found me there and took care of me after that."

"You loved your mother a great deal?" asked Anna, touched and terrified.

"That, too, I cannot say. I loved her dearly as a child. Then as a boy of twenty, when I realized what I was and renounced my father, I harbored a certain bitterness toward her. She had been a partner in the plot to make me what I am."

iv

His lank body drooped for just an instant, then he straightened up, a wild humor in his eyes.

"You remember the song of the soldiers: 'Am I a Man or Am I a Mouse?' Certainly I am a bad job upon the face of the earth. My father sent me to the university, and I became addicted to the fashionable thing in socialism. The Japanese students didn't understand it, but they delighted in aping the white man's spirit of unrest. We plotted toy revolutions among ourselves, and it was well that I joined myself to the scum of the earth, because my mixture of blood made me a despised thing.

"At last I cut away from my father. I have what you call a yellow streak, and it makes me hesitate upon decisions. But one night when I was a little drunker than usual I wrote him a letter and renounced all relationship to him. He had been married again, and had two sons by his Japanese wife, so you see it was easy enough for him to agree with me.

"And so my travels began," he concluded with a twisted smile. "I've been on the road to Nowhere ever since. Everything has its purpose on the face of the earth. Mine is to serve as an object lesson."

"You should think more of yourself," said Anna. "You have a fine mind, and all it needs is a sense of direction."

"You might as well say that I am a fine automobile, and all I need is a new engine. Do you know what Herbert Spencer said about me, possibly before I was born?"

"I can't imagine."

"He wrote a letter to a white man living in Japan and warned him against the intermarriage of whites and Japanese. Hybrids, he said, are usually inferior. Nature rebels against bad mixtures of breed just as much in the human species as in the case of sheep or cattle. If you don't believe it, look at me."

"So you have decided to go wandering again," she mused after a kindly glance at the unsuccessful experiment.

"I have taken passage on the *Shinyo Maru*."

"When does it leave?"

"Next week."

"It may be a long time before we see each other again," said Anna when they were shaking hands.

"We shall never meet again," he declared. "I am returning to my father's country to start a revolution on Christian principles. I have planned to strike against the Mikado, a false god whom the Genro have raised cynically to fool all the people all the time. Until we have ceased to worship the Emperor—a god of flesh—we can never hope to talk on equal terms with the modern world."

"Are you entirely satisfied with the modern world?" she asked.

"No. It has behaved very badly, but it has a hope." The prophetic look came back into his long face as he said: "If it could learn of Japan as Japan has learned of it!"

He stood there squinting his flat gray eyes and lingering over his final message.

"I have said too much about the faults of Japan. Let the Japanese in me speak about America. If you had studied my little half brothers instead of hating them you might know by now how to save the soil of California. Long hours, economical lives, safe investments—see how they have studied 'Poor Richard's Almanac' while American labor has been joy-riding between radical meetings. The

Japanese is not afraid to be poor a few years in order to be prosperous a long time. Perhaps the Japanese do not deserve a share of California, but you can't deny that they work for what they get."

Henry Johnson held out his hand, and all his elfin humor had returned.

"What a wonderful thrift-stamp campaigner I would make," he grinned, and took his departure toward his shabby destiny.

CHAPTER XXXI: EASTWARD BOUND

i

THE taxicab which was to bear them to the ferry was late, of course, and the trip down Market Street was embittered by Susan Skelley's dark predictions. Of course they'd lose the boat, she pointed out, and again they would be thrown upon the tender mercies of "thim dirty Chinees and thim winds that fair tear the hair off ye." To Susan every train was met on Friday the thirteenth and every railroad schedule was a book of evil tidings.

At the foot of Market Street the ferry clock assured them that it was a quarter to one, and they had time to spare; but the situation was complicated by Nan's getting herself lost in a press of pedestrians going in exactly the wrong direction. Susan effected a rescue, however, and two burly porters took charge of the family luggage.

Anna had seized hold of Kipps—the latter loudly protesting that he was too old to be treated like a baby—and Susan was convoying Nan through the jumbled, hurrying crowd, when Kipps stopped in his tracks, upsetting an Italian laborer and his magnificent blanket roll.

"You see not'ing where you go?" snarled the hot-blooded victim of Kipps' perversity, and Anna was formulating an apology when her attention was diverted by the boy's ear-splitting yell.

"Hello, Dunc! Here we are, Dunc! Aw, hur-ee up!"

Dunc Leacy, looking like a traveling millionaire in his sport coat and cap, was shouldering his way through the mob, and as he came up he winked at Kipps and roared: "Seems to me you're taking pretty poor care of your

mother, sonny. Here's a hole in the air. Let me give you a lift, Nannie. There you are!"

That was all his explanation. Anna, torn between an impulse to run away and a desire to make her train, found herself submitting without a word to Dunc Leacy's uninvited management. In all the hurly-burly she had no time to ask how, when or why he had come. She satisfied herself with the sight of his broad shoulders, upon which Nan rode triumphant through the crowd. What a picture they made—the big, clean-looking man and her little girl, whose quiet beauty was always a joy!

He set his decorous burden down as soon as they had reached convenient benches in the waiting-room upstairs, and all that time his face was a puzzle.

"Baggage all right, Anna?" he asked in his matter-of-fact tone.

"I don't know—please don't bother about it," she begged none too cordially.

"Oh, pshaw!" he exclaimed in his usual self-disparagement.

Whereupon he strode among the throng and was gone in search of the porters. Anna was given little time to delve into the enigma of his presence when he came back smiling.

"How many pieces in your band wagon?" he asked cheerfully.

"Eleven," Kipps spoke up promptly.

"All right," he sang out; "the count's correct."

His eyes kept wandering wistfully over to Anna, but he seemed to find no responsive spark there, for he looked more serious when he asked: "What decided you to go all in a rush like this?"

"I didn't know that we were in a rush," she answered coolly.

"I've been scouring the town for you," he grunted. "I've exhausted all the registers in the big hotels and quizzed

every living being that I thought would know anything about you. It wasn't till this morning that I got a trace."

"Where?" she asked in the same guarded tone.

"Baron Tazumi," said he, and his voice betrayed his dislike.

When Susan had led Kipps and Nan nearer to the big door which was soon to slide open she unbent sufficiently to ask: "Why did you want to see me now?"

"You stole away from Bly without a sign," he muttered. "I found the house gutted of furniture and a tribe of Japanese looking it over. It wasn't right to me, Anna. Why don't you ever tell me anything?"

She held her peace, and he went on: "Couldn't you at least have let me know you were going East so soon?"

"I might have," she agreed noncommittally.

"Anna, you've got to marry me," he said quietly.

"What?" she asked, as if she hadn't heard.

"Marry me," he repeated distinctly, so distinctly that she was ashamed and looked away.

"It's too late to talk about that, Dunc."

"Why?"

"There are a great many reasons."

"What sort of reasons?"

"I'm going East in a very few minutes. I intend to stay there."

"Have you got your tickets?"

This seemed a sordid question to be thrown into his song of despair.

"Right here in my bag."

"You haven't any objection to my seeing them, have you?" he asked in a tone which savored of a command.

"Certainly not."

But she made no move toward her bag.

"There have been two or three schedule changes this week," he explained, holding out his hand. "It might be just as well if I looked them over."

She brought out a Southern Pacific envelope and permitted him to examine the accordion-pleated length of pasteboard and the brilliant paper coupons.

"I thought so!" he grunted, and dropped the envelope in his pocket.

"Anything wrong with them, Dunc?" she asked, made nervous by his manner.

"Wrong!"

His thick eyebrows gathered to a frown as he asked suddenly: "At least you'll permit me to see you to the train?"

"It's very kind of you, Dunc," she allowed. "Please tell me about those tickets."

"I'll have to straighten that business out," he answered gruffly. "You keep the party together and I'll take care of these things."

An instant later he disappeared down the steep stairway.

ii

He had asked her to marry him! Realization of this came slowly to Anna's numbed senses. He had arrived too late with an avowal which a few weeks ago would have meant heaven to her. What had occurred to have brought him so suddenly to her feet? Had the black-eyed girl from Oroville refused him and sent him out into the world to seek what consolation he could find?

Anna's heart was still bitter with the things he had said and the looks he had given her at their angry parting in Sacramento. Even in her rage she saw his shining virtues, but they were tainted with faults she could never forgive. And he had, after taking a year of her heart, asked her to marry him!

Anna was wakened from her reverie by the urgent voice of Kipps.

"Moms, they're opening the door to the ferry!"

Plainly enough Anna could see the great door being

rolled back majestically to reveal a wide passage through which travelers were crowding toward the one o'clock boat.

"We'll be late!" wailed Susan Skelley, taking a ghoulish delight in the evil prediction.

"What's holding us, moms?" Kipps was saying, but Anna stood irresolute.

"Mr. Leacy has taken the tickets somewhere to—oh, there he comes!"

A fawn-colored overcoat could be seen among the throng. But as it came near Anna saw that it encased a stout gentleman of Teutonic cast.

"We'll miss the boat!" she lamented softly.

"Of coarse we will," agreed Susan almost cheerfully.

"Dunc's got the tickets," decided Kipps, "and he'll make good all right. He always does."

The boyish faith apparently was built on sand. The crowd had passed through the broad door and thinned out alarmingly when Anna, after beseeching her little party to stay together, hurried downstairs to find the man who had never before proved false to his trust. Another crowd had formed in the waiting-room below, but in all its varied costuming she could see nothing which resembled Dunc Leacy's vivid overcoat. What could have become of him?

Panic now claimed her for its own. The clock had just jumped its larger hand another space forward to point a minute before the hour of one. Anna stood irresolute, not knowing whether to take her family aboard the boat or to wait her chances here.

Somewhere a voice was chanting monotonously to warn the world that all should be aboard. Belated passengers were going at an undignified run toward the open door. Anna's eyes searched helplessly for any trace of Dunc Leacy. The stragglers passed in review.

At last two roustabouts on the lower level began sliding the big door back upon its lock. The minute hand had

jumped to one o'clock. Out in the ferry slip a deep-throated whistle roared farewell.

Anna's party had missed the train, and it was Dunc Leacy's fault!

At that instant she caught sight of him through the steel-wire partition. A porter had just dumped the Bly baggage on the flagstones, and Dunc, jauntily puffing a cigarette, was handing a dollar bill to the obviously pleased menial. He paused for a moment to chat with the man and exchange a joke or two. It was plain to see that Dunc Leacy had not a worry in the world.

He came leisurely through the gate, his every movement expressing indifference to the passage of time. An indulgent smile was on his lips. He threw away his cigarette and removed his cap with a gesture which intimated that he was meeting her for the first time that day.

"Where have you been?" she asked rudely.

"Looking out for your baggage, Anna," he replied in an innocent tone. "I've got it all safe for you. You can count it."

Indeed he indicated the extensive pile jumbled against the wire partition.

"I see you have," she agreed.

"I've been engaging porters in two shifts to look out for it. Watch on, watch off."

"What for?" she asked sharply.

"Well, you see there are a great many pieces. I often wonder why people need so much baggage."

A great silence had fallen over the station. There were no more passengers to clamor round the big door. The newly arrived crowd had settled on the benches to wait. The gate was tight shut on all chances of making the one o'clock boat, which was to meet the East-bound train. At the head of the stairs Anna could see Kipps coming down to impart the news she already knew too well.

"You've made us miss our train!" cried Anna.

"I thought I would," said Dunc, and his words came like a sigh.

"Dunc Leacy, I know you're not stupid enough to make a mistake like this. Just what are you trying to do?"

"Didn't you know?" he asked with a certain childish sweetness.

"I think I deserve an explanation."

"Oh, that's easy enough," he smiled. "I'm keeping you in San Francisco."

Color surged in Anna's cheeks; she couldn't speak.

"You've got to give me a chance to talk to you," he declared, and he wore the look of a man who would not be denied.

CHAPTER XXXII: PRESIDIO HILLS

i

JUST what happened in the hours directly following the train-losing episode neither Kipps nor Susan Skelley could make out. Dunc Leacy's stocks went down several points in Kipps' regard, but they could suffer such a depression and still remain above par. The boy had the feeling which had once tortured him when the New York Giants fell in their final struggle for the pennant. They couldn't be great all the time, and they would come up better than ever upon their next trial.

Susan Skelley rode silently back to the Royalmere. Dunc's behavior merely strengthened her theory that all Californians were more or less insane. She felt, too, that "thim Chinees" were lurking somewhere behind the fiasco. Worse than that, Susan was far from approving her mistress' behavior, for the Blys had scarcely finished their luncheon when Anna Bly, quite without explanation, went forth to spend the afternoon in Dunc Leacy's car.

Anna, true to her appointment to talk it out with Dunc Leacy, was almost as much at sea as Kipps and Susan. She stepped into the he-man's car feeling that she should have been very angry, which she was not. He had tricked her shamelessly, to be sure; but he carried it off with such a high hand that Anna, seated silently beside his busy wheel, had scarce passed ten city blocks when she began to think that he had done nothing more than exercise his just authority.

It was a beautiful afternoon, mild and sweet. There was more languor in the air than is customary in a city

where trade winds blow to stimulate more trade. As the car rolled merrily up the Sutter Street grade Anna could see San Francisco's happy polyglots—Japanese, Italians, Germans, Greeks—gazing dreamily from the windows of their shops. Little girls of every nationality but American played hop-scotch on the sidewalks; their brothers risked their necks on scooters and bicycles, coasting down the steep hills.

The man and woman said very little during that westward drive. His clear gray eyes, glued on the road ahead, seemed lost in speculation. She wanted to ask him what he was thinking about to bring that softened look into his rugged face.

When they had passed the cemetery wall at the top of the grade he turned. At California Street they turned again to the west. And now they were speeding between long rows of pretty houses, each with its garage door facing on the street to make it look like a diminutive fire station. She caught a glimpse of a white façade with daintily curtained windows, and in the glimpse she remembered the Korean woman who had summoned her in the fear that all Tazumi's households might be slain. She wondered if Miss Kim would remain all her little life in that pretty jail.

The road sank into a winding boulevard between handsome houses which clung like fish hawks' nests on the cliffs above the sea. The Pacific! How graciously it feathered its tide against purple rocks upon which the sun, already filmed by low-lying fog, displayed its broad benevolence.

The shaggy hills of the Presidio lay before them, rich and rugged like one of old Leonardo's splendid backgrounds. The steep promontory was a tumbled mass of wind-blown cypress, of brown shrubs and of silvery wild grass which rippled in imitation of the sea below. Hills that in spring had been glorious with blue iris and yellow lupine were now the color of softly burnished metal—old

gold, old silver, old copper. Up the tortuous road they wound, up between wind-twisted trees and shrubs.

At the very summit, just at the point where the road seems to hang like a wind-blown streamer above the racing waves, Dunc Leacy stopped his car and said, "There's a place up there where we can be out of the wind."

She followed submissively until he had found a hollow sweet with grasses a few yards above the road. From that quiet vantage the eye could look far out to sea along the sparkling procession, hurrying forever toward the sunset. Above their heads the ugly snout of a great gun pointed across the Pacific. Out of the mist a graceful steamer, black of hull and white of superstructure, was cleaving the waves toward the Golden Gate. On her smokestacks the insignia of a Japanese line could be discerned.

Anna sat for a long time, wondering if Dunc would ever speak, and if so what his first words would be.

ii

"Anna," he said at last, "do you really want to go away from all this?"

"It isn't what I want," she answered without looking at him. "My life hasn't been guided by that."

"Do you think it was honest to go without telling me?"

"Honest?" She looked at him now, and was uncertain as to the motive of his question as she added: "What you did at the station wasn't exactly puritanical, I should say."

"Perhaps not." He looked out to sea and seemed to be thinking that point over. "I'm a business man, Anna, and when it's a matter of collecting a bill I take the best practical means."

She turned in amazement to encounter that same odd look.

"I suppose you've forgotten, Anna, how much you owe me," he said gruffly.

"Far from it," she replied. "I owe you a great many favors. I don't want you to think I've forgotten them. If you want a brokerage for your share in saving my ~~erop~~—"

"Holy snakes!" he bellowed. "I've forgotten all about that! You owe me a lot more than that, Anna!"

"If you're a business man," she said, "why not be more specific?"

"Do you remember a bet we once made?"

Anna had not forgotten, but she must be reminded.

"You remember," he persisted, "that I bet you would agree with me about the Japanese? The terms, as I recall them, were a carload of asparagus against—"

"How do you know I agree with you about the Japanese?" she temporized.

"Do you still think they're a maligned and persecuted race?"

She made no reply.

"Do you still think they're a blessing to the state of California?" he asked insistently.

She remained silent, her eyes on the light buoy far below.

"Because if you do," he urged, "you'd better give me your address so that I can have the grass shipped to you."

"I don't want asparagus—as much as that," she whispered.

In an instant the winner was collecting his bet. He took a long time to it, and—to be candid—he collected usuriously, for Anna, as we must recall, had staked one kiss—no more—against Dunc Leacy's vegetables.

But now the hour had struck, and Anna Bly clung to the man she had wanted without admitting her want.

"I've loved you so!" he kept repeating.

"Dunc, my dear boy, why didn't you ever tell me this before?"

The question brought him back to earth long enough to give her a puzzled look as he asked: "Haven't I?"

"Dunc, dear, there were a hundred times when I could have cried on your shoulder and begged you to take me away!"

"Is that so?"

He stared at her, quite apparently astounded at this piece of news.

"I haven't any parlor tricks, Anna," he said at last. "I'm a blundering jackass when it comes to saying the things a man ought to say to a lady. But I thought you understood. Somehow or other I was conceited enough to think we'd settled something between us."

Her hand went over to his, because his look had become sad as his eyes followed the sparkling procession of waves.

"You've never told me, Dunc," she whispered. "What's been the trouble?"

"I've been pretty close to the rocks myself, Anna."

"Dunc!"

He pulled his cap over his ears and clapped a palm down on his knee as he always did before an argument.

"I'm a business man, Anna—a business man and an engineer. I don't suppose you know what I've been up against down there on the island. All the time I was hanging round your farm the worry was driving me distracted."

"Poor Dunc!" she said, and stroked his capable hand, wondering what could have kept him aloof so long.

"Every time I came over to Bly I was on the point of asking you. Then the hard fact would show up and come between you and me. I realized how things stood. It would have been a crime to have asked you to marry a bankrupt."

"Why, Dunc, you are celebrated all over the state as the most progressive farmer on the delta!"

"That's it. I got proud and haughty about my reputa-

tion, and wanted to own the earth. I bought out nine hundred acres of pear orchard on the other side of the island. I've mortgaged my crop three years now to hang on. It would have been an easy deal to swing if it hadn't been for labor—that's what's been gouging me blind. This year I saw myself going under and under. Then luck struck again."

"You got your money back on crops?" she asked.

"No, real estate. Do you remember the time I took a trip to Mr. Bowen's place in Oroville?"

How well Anna remembered it! In her heart she was resolved never to let him know how jealous she had been, but she allowed herself to inquire: "You mean the time you went to see the father of that girl with the black eyes?"

"The girl with the black eyes? Oh, yes," he acknowledged, dismissing Miss Bowen forever. "Anyhow, I got rid of half my pear orchards at double their original price. Bowen and I closed last week. I'd hardly got his check in my pocket before I streaked back to Sacramento to see you."

"You wouldn't have sold to the Japanese, would you?" she questioned, looking guiltily into his eyes.

"No, dear girl."

"And you still blame me for the way—the way I took a bribe from the Mikado, as you'd say?"

"I was a fool to be cross with you about that. But when I met you that morning my hopes were higher than the moon. All the way down from Oroville I was working on a plan to take your place over and make it pay. We could have stuck it out together, Anna. But I see the fix you were in. How could you have understood the game as I did?"

He paused as though the question had suggested the one that followed.

"Say, Anna, what was Tazumi's share in that transaction?"

"I don't think he was directly responsible for getting me out of Bly," said Anna. "I—I had a long talk with him the other day. He's doing business under the name of K. Sato, you know."

"That's the general opinion," admitted Dunc. "But don't hold that against him. Titled men of every race use obscure family names for business."

"I wanted to see Sato about the preacher at Bly. The Buddhists, it seems, are forcing the Awagas out. So I wrote a letter to K. Sato, and who should call but Baron Tazumi."

"One of these unofficial official calls. What did he say?"

"Dunc, I have detested Tazumi for a long time. I've never told you this—how could I? But Tazumi wanted me to marry him, and once—once—oh, Dunc!"

She hid her frightened eyes against his shoulder and heard him say, "You almost gave in, didn't you, Anna?"

"God must have saved me from it," she replied. "A Korean woman told me enough to open my eyes. I hoped never to see him again. But after I had talked with him the other day I didn't know what to think. We discussed his religion and mine. He didn't try to be smooth or elusive or diplomatic. I don't believe anybody could have been more candid."

"What did he say?" repeated Dunc Leacy.

"He said he was sorry about the trouble on my farm, and that he would have made things easier for me if I had told him. He said that all the Bly region had to be Japanese; that my farm was a keystone to an arch of land that had to be held solidly together. He said that the Japanese were moving in America, just as they were moving in Manchuria and Siberia, to gain control of the land that was to make them a great people upon earth. He said that he, as Tazumi, was merely an agent in the hands of a divine power."

"Did he mention the name of his divine power?" asked Leacy.

"Oh, yes. He said, 'It is my Emperor,' and when I asked him if he thought the Emperor was divine he replied, 'I don't think it—I know it.'"

"Dunc," went on Anna, "you should have been there to feel as I did about Tazumi. It didn't seem to be the talk of a small man clattering off a lot of propaganda he had learned by heart. He hasn't any of our standards, either moral or social. But according to his own standards he's a very noble gentleman. It's not money for himself or power for himself that he wants. He's giving his life for an ideal just as surely as the little Awagas are doing the same thing in their shabby church at Bly."

"What did he say when you asked him to save the Awagas?"

"He said he'd use all his influence to help them," replied Anna. "And, Dunc, do you know, I think he'll keep his word?"

Leacy sat, his hands clasped across his knees and indulged himself in reflection.

"I often think," he concluded, "that Tazumi's a pretty big man."

iii

They were sitting close together in the cup of a high hill, the deep Pacific swelling below like an enchanted arch between Orient and Occident.

"Dunc," said Anna out of the silence, "I lived with Alec over eight years. We must have been very close together."

"Eight years is a long time," he replied.

"And yet—I hope it isn't wrong for me to ask it. But why is it that I feel this way toward you, Dunc? I'm almost thirty. I've lived a lifetime already, and loved another man as much as I thought I could love anybody. Why is it I have the feeling of something new and wonderful in the world? How am I able to love you more than

anybody—anybody I have ever known?" Tears filled her eyes; her voice was very low.

"It's because we're grown up, Anna," her lover said. "You've got to know life to know love."

Gazing over the sparkling waters, Anna wondered if Zudie, soon to be happy on the other side of the world, knew what life is. The wind was dying with the afternoon, and a splendid peace had settled over the Presidio hills. A hot edge of the sun had already cut its way into the thin line of violet mist lying across the westward ocean.

"Isn't it strange," said Anna dreamily; "when the sun is setting in America it is just rising in Japan?"

"That's a beautiful idea," muttered Dunc Leacy. "There's something terrible about it too."

CHAPTER XXXIII: BLY

i

ANNA did go East after all, but it was on her wedding trip. When they came back to take up their home in the colonial house on the island the rainy season had set in; but the showers were intermittent, and California newspapers were already lamenting the shortage.

During one of the bright weeks between rains Dunc and Anna drove along the concrete road through the twisted streets of Bly. The change in the town was not obvious at first; it required careful inspection to see that all the signs on the stores were now in Japanese. A fat Japanese, plainly the proprietor, stood blinking on the steps of the grocery which had so recently held the defiant sign of Henry Ward. Anna wondered just what riotous scenes had preceded Mr. Ward's capitulation.

Dunc Leacy slowed down in front of the Japanese Methodist Church. A little woman in a prim tailor-made suit had just come out of the door and was walking mincingly round the corner. She did not recognize Anna, who gave a thankful sigh at the sight of Mrs. Awaga, still holding her own.

“Want to go in?” asked the bridegroom of his bride.

“No, dear. But you see that Tazumi kept his word.”

“If he’d been working for a white man I wonder if he’d have kept it as well,” suggested Dunc.

“Hush, hush, Jap hater!” cautioned the bride, giving her he-man an affectionate slap on the elbow.

As they were passing what had once been the Bly prop-

erty Dunc slowed down again. Plowing between rows of naked trees, they saw Mr. Shimba, Esq. He seemed to have grown a little stouter; and as he recognized his former half sharer he removed his battered straw hat and grinned from ear to ear.

"How nice for you!" he cooed and hissed several times. "Everything deliciously O.K. inside this ranch."

"And how is Mrs. Shimba?" asked Anna, curious to know how that venture had turned out.

"Ah, you look see how nice!"

Shimba waved a horny hand toward a little dumpy figure, bending laboriously over a hoe. Beside the woman stood a perambulator from whose depths a feeble wail proclaimed that heaven had smiled very promptly upon the house of Shimba.

THE END

